

ALFRED MYSTERY MAGAZINE HITCHCOCK®

DECEMBER 2007

Car Trouble

The Old Shy
Won't Be Taken
For a Ride...

By JAS. R. PETRIN

Ambrose Bierce
Keith McCarthy
Beverle Graves Myers
Gilbert M. Stack



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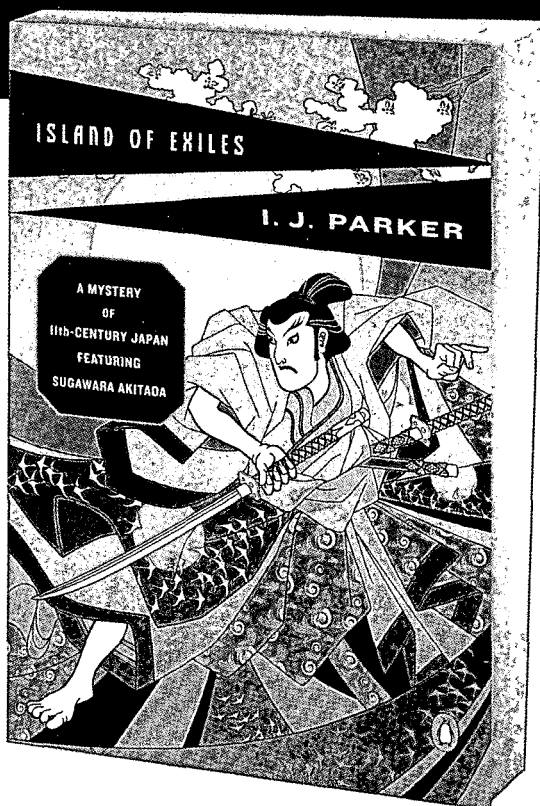
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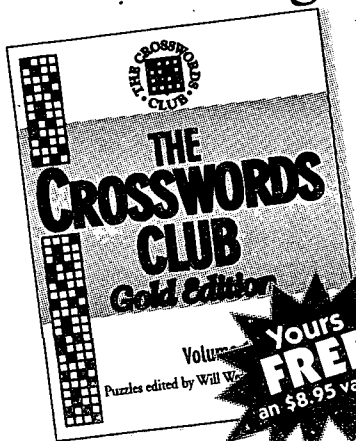
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EDITOR'S NOTES

LINDA LANDRIGAN

CRIME FOR ALL TIME

I have a particular fondness for historical fiction. I enjoy the tactile sense of a bygone world that a good writer conveys. I enjoy learning a bit of history as it is interwoven with the narrative. I enjoy the rich, well-chosen detail distilled from an author's exhaustive research. This month we feature three such detailed and imaginative stories.

Returning author Catherine Mambretti ("The Mute Monja, Or the Walls Could Talk," April 2004) brings to life the period of the early European settlement of America—just at the time when we are noting the 400th anniversary of the founding of Jamestown, Virginia. When Kokoum, husband of Powhatan Princess Pocahantas, is found dead in the woods, suspicion falls first on the starving white "cutthroats," then on Edward, a white slave of the Powhatans, and finally on Pocahantas herself, before the shaman Redhunt, Edward's master, determines what truly happened in the "Dead of Winter." Ms. Mambretti has promised that this story is the first of a series featuring Redhunt and Edward.

Eighteenth century Venetian P.I. Nicco Ziani returns in Beverle Graves Myers's "The Bookworm's Demise," and his investigation into the death of an old impoverished aristocrat reveals a lot about the mores and culture of Venice, the crossroads of Europe and Asia.

And sharp-witted gambler Pandora Parson returns in "Pandora's Fort," the latest installment in Gilbert M. Stack's series featuring itinerant bare-knuckle boxer Corey Callaghan and his trainer Patrick O'Sullivan. As usual, brains and muscle combine to see the trio through another adventure in America's Wild West.

Our other terrific stories this month include DeLoris Stanton Forbes's vignette of life on Saint Maartens, which is not without its problems, in "The Green Flash," and Keith McCarthy's thought-provoking "Mandlebrot's Patterns." Our cover story, Jas. R. Petrin's "Car Trouble," brings back the dying shy Leo "Skig" Skorzeny ("Easy Money," January/February 2007), who becomes a detective (of sorts) when the old woman who cuts his hair is fingered in a murder case.

A special treat this month is Robert C. Hahn's Booked & Printed column. He reviews four mysteries suitable for young adults who're ready for the grownup bookshelves.

THE BOOKWORM'S DEMISE

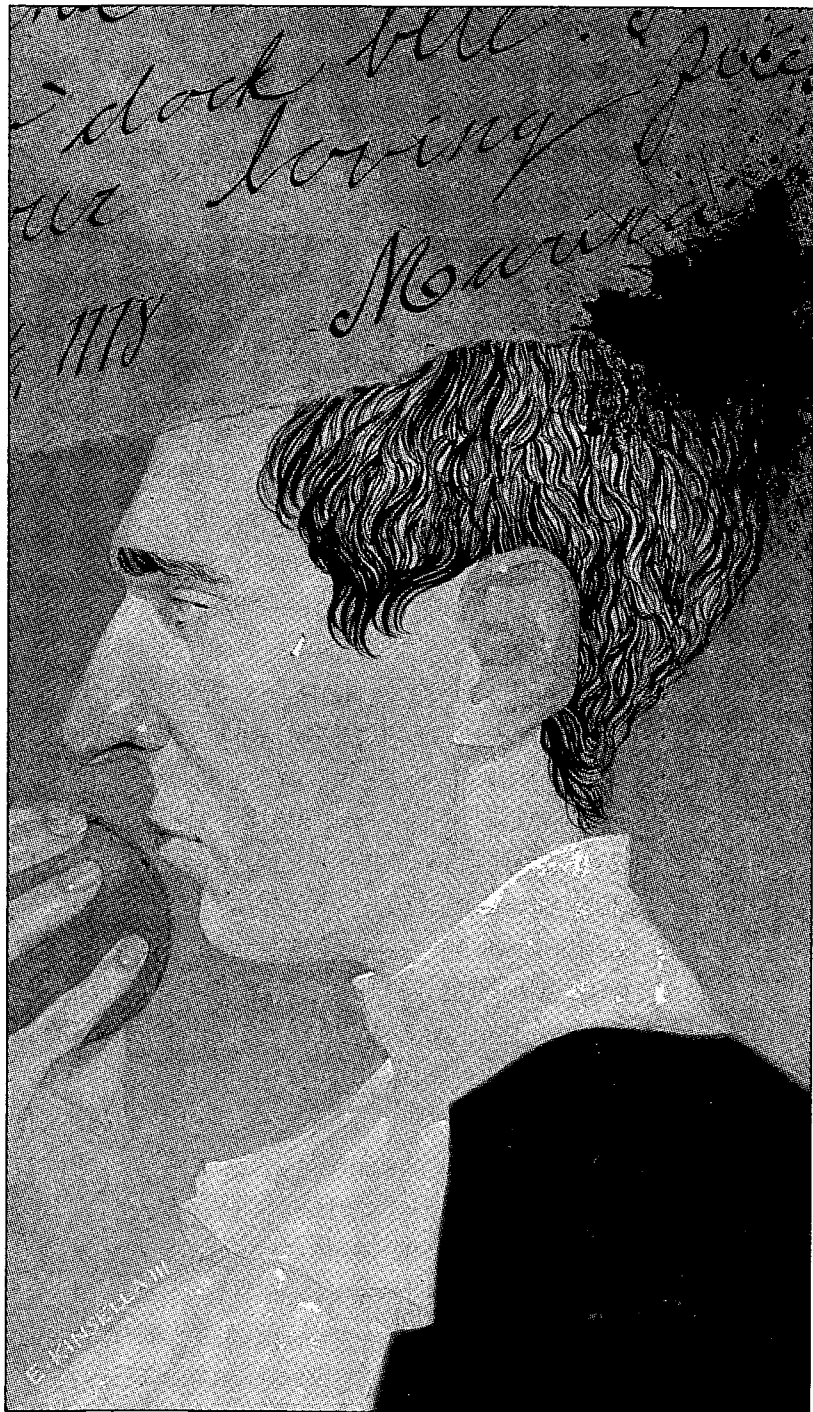
BEVERLE GRAVES MYERS

Old people were not welcome in Venice. In those days, my city danced on the lagoon, a fountain of masquerade and pleasure, merrily ignoring the storm clouds that hovered over the rest of Europe. If your knees creaked too painfully to indulge in minuets, if potential lovers ran when you dropped the mask that hid your wrinkles, Venice had no patience with you. All that remained was to take to your bed, turn your face to the wall, and pray for the good Lord to take you quickly.

It was not just advanced age that made Arcangelo Tartini such a sorry figure. He had to be one of the ugliest men I had ever encountered. Six feet tall, but stooped so that his chin nearly rested on his chest, he had a cadaverous face, with slack, red-rimmed eyes unadorned by lashes or brows. Lower down, his shiny, pink lips worked as ceaselessly as a cow chewing her cud. Whenever we met, he larded his conversation with snatches of verse and flowery prose that put me in mind of a stage actor. Yet his much darned clothing hinted at an aristocratic past, especially the ancient wig I suspected of harboring more than a few fleas among its curls.

Signor Tartini and I lived in the same building. The Ca' Renaldo, a decaying palazzo in the parish of Saint Barnaba, faced a narrow waterway that dumped into the Grand Canal. A fine selection of Venice's human flotsam and jetsam inhabited its cramped rooms. Ruined noblemen with pedigrees that rivaled my own rubbed elbows with swindlers, mediocre artists, and scribes who kept the news-sheets supplied with gossip. The occasional harlot enlivened our lot.

The old gentleman's room was on the floor below mine. His overlooked the courtyard, while mine had a fine view of the canal, if I cared to squeeze through my long window and out onto my narrow balcony. In the way of such things, I wouldn't see Tartini for days on end, and then our paths would cross at every turn.



With a rattle of phlegm, he would make a courtly bow, remind me that he wrote a fine hand, and ask if I needed anything transcribed. That's how he made his living. He copied out letters and romantic sonnets for men who lacked artistic handwriting or composed notes for those who couldn't write at all.

I had given Tartini some business recently when I found the need to send an anonymous letter to a certain lady. I waited in his shabby room while he fetched a writing box of battered mahogany that he stowed under his bed. "The poor man's closet," he explained with a wry grin. After mixing powdered ink with a dollop of water, he sharpened his quill in slow jerks, with hands that were as crabbed as the talons of a hunting bird.

Noting my dubious glance, he said, "Don't worry, your *carissima* will have a letter worthy of the noblest swain. I'm slow these days, but my hands are steady. God willing, they'll remain so. If the palsy ever settles in, I'll starve for sure."

He followed those words with proof of his promise. As I gave voice to my heart's desire, elegant loops and flourishes flowed from his pen. Once he had blown away the blotting sand, he handed over my letter with a gallant gesture that gave me a glimpse of the man he must have been in his youth.

"You've done well, Nicco. To craft a good love letter, you need to begin without knowing what you mean to say and to finish without knowing what you have written." Behind his wire spectacles, one eye closed in a lashless wink. "So says the philosopher Rousseau. Since he's a Frenchman with a string of mistresses, I consider him an expert on such matters."

Chuckling, I'd sweetened the old man's fee with a few extra *soldi*, a reward for his droll melancholy that added a bit of whimsy to my day.

But there would be no more amusing quotes, and I would have to pen my own letters from now on. Carlo Bianchi, one of Ca' Renaldo's newsmongers and Signor Tartini's nearest neighbor, had just knocked at my door to deliver the news. The old man was dead.

"Look him over, Nicco. Tell me what you think." Bianchi had dragged me downstairs to Tartini's room and was stabbing an inky forefinger toward the corpse stretched out on the floor beneath a thin, patchwork coverlet. "Something doesn't smell right."

I wrinkled my nose at the general odor of unlaundered linen and unemptied chamber pot. "What would you expect? He couldn't afford the maid more than once a month."

"You know what I mean. I got you down here because you

understand this messy business. It's murder, Nicco. Murder as plain as the nose on my face."

That would be an obvious murder indeed. Bianchi's ruddy nose was as lumpy and pitted as a misshapen strawberry. Overindulgence in his favorite Montepulciano had also left him with a liverish complexion and a tendency to fall asleep whenever his head touched a cushion. Despite these shortcomings, Bianchi never failed to entertain the readers of the popular *Mondo Morale* with his caustic observations on the daily life of our city.

"Have the *sbirri* been called?" I asked. My business of providing services for the anxious and desperate often put me in conflict with Venice's constabulary. I didn't want to be found hovering over a corpse when the law arrived.

Bianchi gave a short nod. "They've come and gone. Didn't take more than five minutes to call it an accident and send for the wagon from the charnel house."

A timid knock sounded from the hallway. Bianchi answered, slitting the door open and conversing in whispers. Then he shut it and propped his wasted frame against the planks. "Marina from across the hall. She gives her condolences and wants to know if she can do anything."

"Uncommon good manners for a slut."

His reply was barbed. "Like so many here, our Marina has fallen below her natural station."

When I merely shrugged, he nodded toward the body. "Are you going to take a look?"

"All in good time," I murmured, opening the slatted blind to admit a ladder of bright July sunshine.

At the center of the room, beside the corpse, stood a chair and a table that held Tartini's writing box. The lid was shut. Its hinges creaked as I swung it back. The paper was neatly stacked in its compartment and the pen had been wiped clean, but the sand shaker had overturned to spill its granules in a miniature pyramid.

I shook my head at the open ink jar. The old man was probably regaling Heaven's angels with witty epigrams, but if he chanced to cast an eye down to earth, he would be very annoyed to see his expensive ink drying up. I solemnly replaced the glass stopper.

Across the room, a bedstead was covered with a sheet that trailed down onto a fraying mat and a welter of old news-sheets. A few articles of clothing hung from wall pegs.

As I'd noted on my previous visit, the opposite wall contained a roughly built shelf that stretched from floor to ceiling. It overflowed with volumes bound in leather or marbled paper. I ran my finger along the spines, many with titles picked out in gilt. Books

of poetry kept company with accounts of military conquest and plays written in several languages. A literary hodgepodge. Yet I had a feeling that the old man could have easily put his hand on any book he fancied.

I unshelved a volume of Dante, ran my hand over the butter-soft leather, and lingered over the fearsome illustrations of the poet's view of Hell. The old man evidently took better care of his books than himself. The Dante was free of dust and showed no sign of bookworm or dampstain. A bold signature decorated the flyleaf, but it wasn't Arcangelo Tartini's.

Bianchi had abandoned his post at the door and was standing over the body with crossed arms. "I didn't expect a man with your reputation to shirk from death."

I replaced the Dante with a reluctant sigh. "All right, let's see the old bookworm."

Bianchi bent to jerk the coverlet away. As I knelt, a sharp pain ran through both knees. I was nowhere near as ancient as our dead neighbor, but my joints had begun to remind me that my fledgling days were long past.

Tartini lay on his left side, his wig askew and sticky with blood from a wound at the back of his skull. Wire spectacles dangled from his right hand. One lens had cracked in the shape of a crow's foot. Tartini's toothless mouth formed an oval of surprise, but his eyes were shut.

Bianchi's gaze followed my own. "I closed them first thing. Couldn't stand not to."

"You discovered him?"

"That's right, not quite an hour ago. After I saw he was beyond help, I sent one of Mimmo's boys for the *sbirri*. We had quite a dustup. They're convinced that Signor Tartini slipped and hit his head right there."

Bianchi pointed to a smear of blood on the near edge of the table. I stood to take a closer look. Gauging the position of the body and the chair that had been pushed aside, I decided that the *sbirri* might have stumbled on the correct conclusion. The constables were coarse men, more skilled at catching pickpockets than investigating suspicious deaths, but like the old proverb goes: Even the worst fisherman gets lucky sometimes.

Bianchi seemed to divine my thoughts. "Don't be so hasty. Keep looking."

"If you insist," I replied, drumming my fingers on the lid of the writing box, trying to picture Tartini's last movements. In addition to the box, the tabletop held a small lamp for warming sealing wax and a plate bearing a ripe peach and a paring knife. The old

man must have interrupted his work to eat his breakfast.

My mouth watered at the sight of the fruit. I reached for the peach, pressed its fuzzy skin to my nose, and took a deep, voluptuous whiff. I'd heard the singsong cries of the fruit seller paddling along the canal earlier that morning: "First peaches of the season. Straight from the mainland. Come buy. Come buy." I hadn't tasted a peach since last summer. If my purse wasn't as thin as a sow's ear, I would have called to the man and pulled some up in a basket.

There was one odd note in this tabletop tableau—a balled-up handkerchief with a dainty lace edging stuffed under the rim of the plate. I unfolded it to find a gnarled pit and a few shreds of browning peach skin.

"According to the *sbirri*, that's what sent him on his way," said Bianchi.

"What? A piece of fruit?"

"He slipped on a discarded skin."

My eyes ran over the corpse's waistcoat embroidered with silver thread that had tarnished to black, the woolen breeches shiny with wear, the white stockings striped with ladders that revealed bruised shanks. Tartini's buckled shoes were in no better condition than the rest of his attire, but there was something else.

"They're on the wrong feet," I said.

"Exactly," Bianchi replied. With no flinching that I could detect, he removed the shoes that slewed from Tartini's bony feet and handed them to me. A slick peach skin stuck to each bumpy sole. Corresponding stains marred the tiles at Tartini's toes. "I'll admit our friend could be unsteady at times, Nicco, but his wits were quick and sure. He never put his shoes on the wrong feet."

My blood beat in my ears. Now I saw why Bianchi was so insistent on murder. "Someone staged this."

He nodded. "Someone who was in too much of a hurry to make sure the shoes got back on the right feet after they'd been ground into the peach skin."

"Why the hurry, I wonder."

"I might have had something to do with that. Once I come to life in the morning, I open the blinds and lean out the window to call to the old man. Just to see if he made it through the night, you know. His shiny bald head usually pops right out. We trade a bit of chaff and that's it."

"But not today."

"No, I hailed him several times. When he didn't answer I jumped in my breeches and ran next door."

"The door was unlocked?"

Bianchi nodded.

"Anyone in the hall?"

"No one. And I'll tell you something else." He tapped his red nose. "I can play bloodhound too. I've already talked to Mimmo. He's been watching the door all morning, and there've been no strangers on the staircase, coming or going."

"That means someone from the Ca' Renaldo did this."

"Yes." Bianchi's tone could have frozen a pitcher of cream in one breath. "Unless a murderer from outside crawled up the side of the building like a spider, it's one of us."

"Would you like to tell me who you suspect?"

He spread his hands. "I have no idea—that's why I called you. Old Tartini was as meek as a lamb. He posed a threat to no one, and he didn't have two *soldi* to rub together."

I raised my eyes to the shelf bulging with literature of the ages. "Books like those don't come cheap."

Bianchi dismissed the books with the shrug of a man who reads nothing but news-sheets. "Probably had those forever. Might've been selling them off when his scribbling didn't pay."

I let my gaze range over the polished leather bindings and then asked, "Did the constables notice the shoes?"

"I made certain they did, but they weren't impressed. They insisted that he was simply a senile old fool."

I exhaled through pursed lips. Already knowing the answer, I asked, "What do you want me to do?"

"Find out who did it, of course. You can't tell me you're in someone's hire because I've seen you holding down a bench at Sperazzi's coffee house all week."

He was right, but I didn't want to say so.

Bianchi clutched my sleeve. "Nicco, he has no family left. He's old and alone, and we're the only ones who might come close to caring what actually happened."

I looked around the drab little room, so like my own, except for the books. A pair of flies buzzed around the ripe fruit on the table. As I slowly nodded my assent, someone pounded on the door hard enough to make it bounce in its case. The charnel wagon had arrived.

Marina had taken up residence at the Ca' Renaldo less than a month ago. A few times I'd seen her flit through the lobby on her way out into the night. Bidding me good evening, she'd sent me a saucy glance through the flimsy veil of the *zendale* that covered her sleek hair and white shoulders. I'd responded with the bow of a man who was desolated to be otherwise engaged.

After Bianchi had gone about his business, I stepped across the

hall and knocked at the young harlot's door. She answered with a quavering, "Come in."

I found her kneeling before a makeshift prie-dieu that she'd fashioned from an upended carton. She clasped a string of rose-colored beads between her palms. Black smoke curled from a squat tallow candle, and a plaster statue of the Blessed Virgin beamed a crooked smile at the infant Jesus in her arms.

"Oh, it's you Signor Ziani. Have they taken the poor old fellow away?"

"Yes. And it's Nicco."

"I feel so bad . . . Nicco. It's all my fault, you know." Marina's eyes were swollen and the whites reddened, marring the plump prettiness of her face. Except for the plunging bodice of her day dress, she looked the part of an innocent dove newly released from the cage of a convent school. Give her two more years, I thought, and then her softness will have given way to the brittle coarseness of her sisters on the street.

"What do you mean? Your fault?" I asked smoothly, noting the dressing table emblazoned with a slash of spilled powder, the unmade bed piled with rumpled corsets and petticoats.

Marina blew out the candle and rose from the floor in one insufferably fluid motion. What I wouldn't have traded for those young knees. She sent me a wan smile as she tidied the bed. The underclothes she tossed behind a folding screen; then she unfurled a lacy shawl that disgorged a hail of something. Dust? Powder? One gritty piece lodged in the corner of my eye, but not before I'd caught a glimpse of a drawstring bag falling to the mattress with a metallic clink. While I rubbed my eye, a blushing Marina quickly stuffed the bag in a drawer, as if she were ashamed of how she'd earned those coins.

Only then was Marina ready to discuss what had sent her to her prayers. She drifted over to the window and beckoned me to join her. "A man selling peaches came down the canal this morning," she said in a low voice.

"I heard him." I indicated the balcony that jutted out over her window. "That's my room on the third floor."

"Is it, now?" She cocked her head, then continued, "I lowered my basket and bought half a dozen. They were sheer heaven—perfectly ripe and dripping with juice. I ate till I thought I would burst and still had two left. Then I thought of Signor Tartini. You know the way he talked?"

I nodded.

"Sometimes I wasn't sure what he meant by his fancy words, but he spoke like such a polite gentleman, never mocking. Just yesterday

he called to me as I was going out. 'Sweet Helen, make me immortal with thy kiss,' he said. I thought my name had slipped his mind. 'I'm Marina,' I called back. He just laughed. But not at me. His laugh sounded sad in a way, as if he really meant to cry." She propped her head against the window frame and gave her own ambiguous chuckle. "Do you know what he was talking about?"

"He was comparing you to Helen of Troy, a woman so beautiful that two nations went to war over her."

Marina twisted her lips into a shrewd sneer. "That's ridiculous. Men don't fight over beauty. They fight over land and power. Or gold."

I shrugged. "So you decided to give smooth-tongued Tartini some peaches?"

"Yes, I thought they would make a nice treat for him." She pressed fingers to her eyes and continued in jerky sobs. "If I'd only known—if I thought for one minute that he would have slipped on the skins—I never would have done anything to hurt him."

"You heard what happened then?"

She nodded, sniffing. "The *sbirri* were talking about it. I admitted giving him the peaches, but they didn't care."

I dug into my jacket pocket. "Then this must be yours." I produced the handkerchief I'd carried away from Tartini's room. The white linen was stained with golden peach juice and a few flecks of reddish-brown.

"Yes, I carried the fruit over in this." She pinched the handkerchief between two fingers, wrinkled her nose, and surprised me by tossing it out the window. I made a grab for the linen square, but a puff of wind whisked it away and deposited it on the sun-kissed water of the canal. I lost sight of it among the gondolas and barges.

"You could have laundered it," I observed.

Shaking her head, she crossed her arms against her tight-fitting bodice. "It's trash now. I never want to see it again."

The window must have been Marina's exclusive trash basket. Eggshells and peach skins and scraps of paper littered the ledge that separated the first and second story.

"What was Tartini doing when you delivered the peaches?"

"I don't know. He opened the door and invited me in, but I said no. I was still in my nightclothes, with just a shawl over my shoulders. I handed him the fruit and popped back over here."

"You didn't step in his room, even for a minute?"

"No."

"Was anyone else with him? Perhaps someone using his services?"

She considered, one finger tracing the outline of her rosy mouth. "He only opened the door a crack, so I couldn't see any-

one. But . . . people were always coming to his door to have something written out. I suppose he could have had a visitor. Why, Nicco?"

"It's possible that Signor Tartini's death was not a simple accident."

"But the *sbirri* said—"

"The *sbirri* are not the closest of observers. They snap at the obvious conclusion like a sturgeon at a minnow. Several of us believe there is more to the story."

"You and Signor Bianchi?"

I nodded.

"What makes you think so?"

"If you don't mind, I'd rather keep that to myself for now."

Her hand fluttered to her heart. "I would be so relieved to hear that my peaches were not the cause of my neighbor's demise. But—" She paused and her eyes grew round as buttons. "I can't imagine why anyone would harm such a nice old man."

"That is what I will be trying to discover."

As I turned toward the door, Marina detained me with a hand on my arm. The gossamer grip I expected felt more like an iron clamp. Her voice took on a husky note. "You will keep me informed, Nicco? Now that you've found your way to my room, you will always be a welcome visitor."

I pried her hand loose and, after kissing her fingertips, took my leave.

The lobby of the Ca' Renaldo had once been a spacious room of elegant proportions, its walls hung with sky blue silk damask and its ceiling molded with coffers of ornamental stucco. Now the stairway from the upper stories issued into a wretched passageway flanked with small, hastily built apartments. Shreds of mildewed silk still clung to the crumbling plaster in odd corners.

A giant named Mimmo ruled this tiny kingdom. The throne that contained his pendulous backside was a broken-down armchair by the front entrance. More watchman than doorkeeper, Mimmo kept the tarnished bronze doors propped open in all but the most inclement weather and surveyed our comings and goings with a gimlet eye. His family delivered his food and he ate nearly all the time: fritters dusted with sugar, bowls of steaming mussel soup, and fried fish wrapped in news-sheets. When he slept was a mystery.

I asked Mimmo who had passed through the lobby that morning.

Scratching his head, he rolled his eyes toward the ceiling. At the same time, his right hand turned palm up and inched forward.

"I'm flushed out, Mimmo. Don't have so much as a *soldo*. I was

hoping you'd tell me for Tartini's sake. The old man was always good to you, wasn't he?"

"So he was." Mimmo grunted and wiped greasy hands on his breeches. "Not like some others who think they're still masters of the palazzo."

"Well?"

Mimmo named the men who still had jobs to go to. Then the women who were domestic enough to go to the market for food to prepare for the midday meal.

"And who came in from outside?"

"The water boy made his rounds. The apple woman. The man who sells the lottery tickets. Just the usual folk."

It was as Bianchi had said. No strangers.

"Do you know of anyone who bore a grudge against Signor Tartini?"

Mimmo grinned, revealing brown stumps in shiny gums. "The old man didn't slip, did he?"

When he saw I didn't intend to answer, he continued, "You need to talk to Claudio Pisani. Know him?"

I nodded. The Pisani name had been inscribed in the Golden Book centuries ago and distant cousins had given epic service in Venice's quest to dominate Mediterranean shipping. But family trees always sprout a few brittle branches. Like both myself and Signor Tartini, Claudio Pisani was merely an impoverished aristocrat who lived from hand to mouth on a tiny government allowance supplemented by whatever funds he could scare up on his own. I knew him for an arrogant, bitter man.

"Pisani had a problem with Tartini?"

"They had a fight on the water landing. I saw the whole thing." He nodded through the open door toward the narrow pavement where gondolas drew up.

"What happened?"

"Pisani took one of the old man's little sayings as an insult. His face got red as a beet, and he laid his walking stick about Tartini's head and shoulders. Poor Tartini was driven down on one knee. Only his hat and wig kept him from getting a busted crown."

"Did you go to help him?"

Mimmo shifted his bulk in the chair. "Weren't no need. The boatmen jumped in and pulled Pisani off. Tartini must've been all right. He stepped in a gondola and away he went."

"Pisani too?"

"He went the other way, but only after he shook his stick at the stern of Tartini's boat, yelling threats."

"What did Pisani threaten exactly?"

Mimmo sat up a little straighter. He raised his eyebrows and lengthened his jaw. In an amazing rendition of Pisani's patrician drawl, he declaimed, "I'll send you to Hades if you ever dare address me in that manner again."

"When was this?"

"A week ago, near as like."

"Is Pisani in his room?"

Mimmo shook his head and sank back down in his pillows. "He went out a few minutes after the *shirri* left."

I nodded thoughtfully. A visit to the Broglio was in order. I stepped toward the sun-drenched entrance and then turned. "One more thing, Mimmo. Did you happen to hear what set Pisani off in the first place?"

"Partly. Tartini said something about weak fruit dropping early to the ground."

In theory, the Most Serene Republic of Venice was governed by the Senate, which met in the Ducal Palace every Thursday and Saturday. Presided over by the doge, this body admitted only patrician men of good families who had attained the age of forty and been voted in by their peers.

In practice, everybody knew that decisions of state were made more informally, on the Broglio outside the palace. Influential senators in their black robes of office strolled along that celebrated arcade, linking arms and deciding the fate of our city in mellow whispers. Once plots were well hatched, they called to their lackeys waiting at the base of Saint Mark's column and delivered their orders.

That's where I would find Pisani. As a minor senator kept in office by his betters, he lined his pockets by selling his vote.

I ignored the boats at the Ca' Renaldo's mooring posts. I might be able to beg my dinner with a smile and a promise, but gondoliers demanded hard silver. I rounded the building, crossed a courtyard hung with flapping linen, and darted down an alley that led toward the Rialto Bridge. The sight of a bookseller's awning made me pause. If Tartini had been selling off his books, this would've been the most convenient spot.

I squeezed between a pair of stalls piled with used volumes and entered a dark shop that smelled of ink and glue overlaid with dust. A dried-up fellow in a coat the color of cheap snuff manned the counter.

"Do you know a book collector named Tartini?" I asked.

"Arcangelo the Pest?" The bookseller grinned. "That's my name for him. He's not so bad really. Not many gentlemen scholars like him

around these days. We sometimes take a dish of coffee together."

With a sinking feeling in my belly, I realized I'd have to tell the man about Tartini's death. I didn't mince words.

The bookseller's eyes searched mine as he made a slow sign of the cross. "How can I help you?"

"I need to know if Tartini sold any books recently."

"Arcangelo sell his precious books? Not likely."

"But . . . I thought perhaps he needed money. His letter writing couldn't have made enough to keep a cat alive."

The man shook his head. "When he didn't have money, he would come in to read, not to sell. He devoured books with his eyes, like a hungry man falls on a plate of macaroni."

"Did he get in your way?"

"Sometimes, but I generally let him stay as long as he liked. Arcangelo was far from my best customer, but when his purse was jingling, he'd always buy a few favorites."

I rubbed my chin, trying to imagine my moth-eaten neighbor with a bulging purse. "How often would that be?"

"He bought in fits and starts. Mostly a book or two a month but once in a while, an armload."

"When was the last time that happened?"

The bookseller swept his gaze over the towering shelves. He sighed. "Must have been during *Carnevale*. There were several other customers in the shop that day—Englishmen in masks looking for books their London censors would never allow."

"*Carnevale* runs from October through February," I observed dryly.

"It was October, I think. Perhaps November."

"Did the old man ever mention how he came by these funds?"

"Only in his way. I once remarked that his copying business must be going well. With a wink and a nod, he recited, 'At every word a reputation dies.'"

I contemplated those words as I crossed the bridge and dodged the shoppers on the bustling Mercerie. By the time I'd reached the Piazza, I was wondering if my neighbor was really the harmless old man that he appeared.

When I'd allowed Tartini to copy out my lovesick musings, I suppose I thought he would forget my words as soon as the ink was dry. But what if he hadn't? If he could recite snatches of poetry from so many books in his collection, he possessed a formidable memory. What if he remembered all the words he copied and repeated them for his own gain? I could hardly blame the old man for surviving: Even as I crossed the warm paving stones, I was battling the cold ball of fear that settled behind my breastbone when-

ever my purse was empty. Perhaps Tartini had crossed someone with less sympathy for an old man's plight.

Once I'd reached the Ducal Palace, I spotted Claudio Pisani having his boots shined at the base of the column that bears the winged lion of Saint Mark. He was a thin man with narrow shoulders, a long neck, and a prominent Adam's apple that he tried to hide with a ruffled cravat. His muddy brown eyes narrowed as I propped a foot on the step.

"I need to talk to you," I said.

Pisani tossed the bootblack a coin and pushed to his feet with the aid of his silver-headed walking stick. He stretched its shaft toward the sparkling water of the lagoon. "We'll walk on the jetty," he replied with a smirk. "Finally getting smart, Ziani?"

"Eh?"

"You have an ancient name. No one has forgotten that a Ziani once occupied the Ducal Palace." He waved his stick toward the structure of pink marble on our left. "If you'd let me introduce you to the right people, you could be holding down a senate seat by next year."

"That wouldn't leave much time for my work."

"Retrieving Marchesa Tebaldi's lost lapdog?" He gave a snide laugh. "Yes, I heard about that one. Or discovering which apprentice has his hand in the master's till? Hardly work for a gentleman."

"But work that suits me," I murmured.

"Then what do you want with me?"

I shaded my eyes with my hand as if I were staring at the islands rising from the jade water of the lagoon; I was really keeping a sidelong watch on Pisani. "I came to ask you about the murder of Signor Tartini."

"What? That sheep-faced old rattlebrain finally got his comeuppance?"

"He's dead, if that's what you mean. I thought everyone at the Ca' Renaldo had heard the news by now."

"Not me. I arose late this morning and had to hurry to attend Senator Erizzo." Pisani glanced back toward the Broglio, fiddling with the lace at his collar. "What on earth could Tartini's murder have to do with me?"

"I'm told you quarreled recently."

"By Mimmo, I presume? That jabbering lard-ass doesn't have the sense God gave him."

"Do you deny arguing with Tartini?"

Pisani tapped his stick on the paving stones. "No. I'll admit I let Tartini get my goat. The man couched his impudence in learned

discourse, but he was still insulting. Men of our class shouldn't tolerate insults."

"Or betrayal."

He cocked his head and sent me a puzzled look. "No, not that either."

"Yet it would hardly be honorable to challenge a feeble, elderly man to a duel."

"Of course not."

"So perhaps you restored your honor in a different fashion."

"A covert dagger in the ribs? Surely that sort of intrigue went out with the last century."

"Tartini wasn't stabbed. Someone delivered a blow to the back of his head while he bent over his writing table. Would you mind if I took a look at your stick?"

Pisani's jaw dropped until he resembled a dumfounded puppet in a Punch and Judy show. But he handed me the stick. I curled my fingers around the smooth ebony and tested its heft by beating its silver knob against my palm. Then I inspected it more closely, paying particular attention to the junction where the wood met the silver.

"An excellent weapon," I said. "No trace of blood, but the material would be easy to wipe clean."

A flush rose to Pisani's sharp cheekbones. "You turd-sucking son of a whore. I'll have your head for that vile accusation."

"Are you challenging *me* to a duel? We could meet on the Lido at dawn. I possess a fine pair of pistols."

The color drained from his face as quickly as it had come. He shook his head without making a sound.

"No?" I asked. "Thought not. You're better at hurling names than bullets. Did you call Tartini 'a sheep-faced old rattlebrain' before you beat him over the head?"

"I didn't kill him, Ziani. I've never even been in his room. What makes you think he would let me in? He liked me no better than I liked him."

"I think he would admit anyone who hired him to copy letters, especially letters that pertained to affairs of state."

Pisani snatched his stick back. "I'm quite capable of writing my own letters, and if you think Senator Erizzo would direct me to do otherwise, you're a . . . um . . . thoroughly mistaken."

"This morning, were you alone in your room until you left the Ca' Renaldo?"

"Of course, I live alone. Who would I entertain at such an hour?"

I shrugged. "We have several ladies available for an evening's hire."

"I don't choose my bedmates from the gutter." His mouth curled in a sneer. "Now, if you'll excuse me, important work awaits."

I made my way to a noisy square in the shadow of the Rialto Bridge, brain in a whirl and stomach rumbling. I knew a cafe where my credit was good, but as it happened, I wasn't forced to add to my tab. Signor Bianchi had just sat down to a mammoth plate of macaroni, full wineglass at hand. Excellent. The news grubber owed me a meal.

"Another of the same," I called to the waiter as I flopped onto the bench.

"Ah, Nicco, how goes our quest?" asked Bianchi.

"Our quest? I'm the one that's been burning shoe leather all day."

"I haven't slighted my part." The journalist produced a rolled sheaf of paper and shook it at me like a schoolmaster's rod.

"What's that?" I asked, helping myself to a gulp of his wine.

"An article for the *Mondo Morale*. A paean of praise to the chief of Venice's constabulary and his efforts to make our city a model of order and safety."

I raised my eyebrows. "Have you taken leave of your senses? A lazier, more corrupt official than the current Messer Grande would be hard to find."

He shoveled in another spoonful of macaroni, chewed, and then answered judiciously. "Favors beget favors. After he's read this, Messer Grande will be more likely to listen to our theory about who killed Tartini."

"Except that we don't have a theory." I gave Bianchi an abbreviated version of my progress, or lack of it.

He pulled at his red nose. "Pisani's a weasel. If there's any justice in this world, he should be the killer."

"Pisani may embody all that is wrong with our ailing city, but I don't believe he murdered Tartini. He's too much of a coward."

"Then who? No one else held a grain of ill will toward the old man."

"Tartini made a pest of himself at the bookshop."

Bianchi rolled his eyes and threw back a gulp of wine.

"Then there's his copying business," I continued. "What if Tartini sold information meant for selected eyes only?"

"You may have something there," the journalist answered slowly. "But the old man kept no records. How would you track down an angry customer?"

Bianchi applied himself to his macaroni. I did the same when the waiter arrived with my steaming bowl. Once I'd downed every bite and soaked up the remains of the garlic-drenched

sauce with a hunk of bread, I sat back with a sigh. The cafe was low ceilinged and crowded. Countrymen who'd ferried vegetables to market rubbed shoulders with clerks who tallied figures at the warehouses that received goods from the four points of the compass.

Just inside the door, a copyist had set up a portable writing desk that could have been Signor Tartini's. I watched him work with a heavy heart. A Turk with his head wrapped in white muslin stood over his shoulder, jabbering in the traders' lingua franca. The copyist stopped writing several times to ask questions. After the letter was completed to the Turk's satisfaction, the copyist applied blotting sand and waved the paper through the air. The Turk's fist flew to his eye and a new round of jabbering began. A grain of sand must have lodged in his eye.

I sat forward, nerves on the alert. Several scenes from the morning came back to me, and I suddenly began to wonder if I'd been lied to.

"What is it, Nicco?" asked Bianchi.

"I'm not sure," I replied. "Let's get back to the Ca' Renaldo. There's something I must do, and I may need your help."

The next hour did not go as smoothly as planned. I thought it would be an easy matter to climb over my balcony railing and lower myself to the ledge that ran around the building. During my student days at the University of Padua, I'd often snuck out for a night of carousing using just such a maneuver. I'd conveniently forgotten my creaky knees and my old shoulder injury.

In the end, I went fishing. A broken stickpin made a serviceable hook, yarn was obtained from a generous signora down the hall, and Bianchi located a broom handle for a pole. With the journalist clutching my waistband, I leaned over the railing and cast my line. My target was a ball of crumpled paper on the ledge beyond Marina's window.

The hook fell short. Again and again. Frustration mounting, I slung one leg over the scrolled iron railing. With Bianchi balancing my weight, I hovered in the muggy air over the canal and put my good arm into play. The stickpin glinted as it arced toward my treasure.

Success at last. The hook landed beyond the paper and snagged it as I drew the hook along the ledge. Barely daring to breathe, I reeled in the yarn hand over hand until the crumpled ball was nearly in my grasp. Bianchi snatched it away and ran inside. By the time I'd untangled myself from the railing, he had the brief letter spread out on my table.

Ca' Renaldo, July 6, 1778

Dear Signor Querini,
You will find me on the steps of the Basilica tonight
after the nine o'clock bell. I'm aflame with desire.
Don't disappoint me.

Your loving friend,
Marina

Bianchi scratched his head. "This is what you risked your neck for? A note of assignation?"

"It's worth it, don't you think?"

He read through the note again. "Why? Is Signor Querini the murderer?"

I shook my head emphatically. "It's not the name, it's the date. Today's date. Marina did enter Tartini's room this morning. And not only to treat him to some peaches."

Dusk was falling. I'd just closed the drapes over my long window and lit some candles when Marina knocked at my door. Her gown of French blue wasn't overly clean, but she was still a vision, with her dark hair swept up by gold pins and a fichu of silk gauze arranged over her bosom. A drawstring bag of the same fabric as her dress dangled gracefully from her wrist.

"Mimmo said you wanted to see me," she cooed in dulcet tones. "I have an appointment later, but I can always spare an hour for my handsome neighbor."

"Oh," I said, settling myself in my one good armchair. "Are you meeting Signor Querini?"

She raised a sharp eyebrow. "You're very well informed about my business."

"You informed me yourself. In this letter." I pulled the crumpled, folded sheet from my waistcoat pocket.

Marina crossed the room in a flash. Her small hand darted toward the letter; this time I was ready.

I grabbed her wrist. She raked the nails of her other hand across my cheek. After a short struggle, the harlot was in the chair with me standing above her.

"Why did you kill Tartini?" I asked.

Except for her flaming dark eyes, Marina showed no emotion. She pressed her lips in a firm line.

"You lied to me, Marina. You took Tartini the peaches, but you also asked him to write out a note. You must have stood right above him, smiling, teasing the old fellow with a glimpse of your

nightshift. Were you pressing up against him? Grains of blotting sand lodged in your shawl, you know. One of them blew in my eye this morning."

She released the strings of her bag and drew out a handkerchief. Dabbing at her tearless cheeks, she replied, "So I had Tartini write out a message of a personal nature that I didn't want to share with you or anyone el—"

"Not a very important message," I cut in. "Since you went straight to your room and tossed it away."

"What of it? I'm entitled to change my mind if I want. The only thing that matters is that Tartini was alive when I left his room. . . ." She paused to sniff disdainfully. "He was slicing into a peach. Drool was running down his chin."

I shook my head. "Poor Tartini never got a bite. When he bent to fold the paper for the sealing wax, you bashed his head. Then you pulled him out of his chair and arranged the scene to look as if he'd slipped and fallen. But you made a mistake. In your haste, you crammed his shoes on the wrong feet."

She rose in a whoosh of satin skirts. "How imaginative you are, Nicco. You ought to turn your hand to writing for the stage. Preposterous comedies would be right in your line. You could have tiny women wielding huge clubs and stalking giants."

"You didn't need a club. You used this." I ripped her bag from her wrist and shook the limp sack in her face. "This is empty now, but this morning it was full of coins. A perfect cosh and one you could easily swing."

She drew herself up. "I'm going now. Don't try and stop me."

"All I want is an explanation, Marina."

She stepped toward the door.

I couldn't compel her to talk, but I had one last card to play. "Why on earth would you kill such a harmless old gentleman like Tartini? Surely he never hurt a flea."

"Harmless?" She turned. Her gorgon stare could have terrified an army. "You really have no idea, do you? Arcangelo Tartini was a monster."

"Had he written other letters for you?" I asked quickly. "Secret letters that he shared with someone else?"

I could barely hear her answer: "Not my letter. Antonio's."

I questioned her with my gaze.

"My father owns a lace factory, prosperous and very respectable. You would recognize the name, but I won't tell you. I use my mother's family name now."

"Yes," I prompted.

"Papa has never been satisfied. All my life, he's always lusted for

more than we had. For months, he pressed the elector of the lace guild to ask for my hand in marriage. Otho Taliferro was a widower with a factory to rival Papa's. When he finally made his proposal, all I heard for weeks was how a merger of the two businesses would make both families rich." She fell silent, gazing into space with a faraway look.

"Who was Antonio?"

"Antonio was a young man who owned a barge. He picked up our cartons of finished lace and delivered them to the docks." Her voice fell to a whisper. "Antonio was my love. We were planning to run away before Papa could marry me off to Otho."

"Let me guess. Antonio had Tartini write a letter."

She nodded. "Antonio worked hard, but he wasn't educated. Once he'd planned the details of our elopement, he had to smuggle a letter into the house. Papa had become suspicious, you see, and wouldn't let me out on the water landing." Real tears coursed down her cheeks. "If only Antonio hadn't hired Tartini to write that letter."

"What happened?"

"I received a letter. So did Papa. He gave Tartini a handsome reward for alerting him to Antonio's plan, then had Antonio beaten and run out of Venice. I thought my lover might sneak back. I waited and hoped, but he didn't return."

"Did you marry the widower?"

"No, I was going to have a baby. Four months along . . . too late to hide. Papa was angrier than I'd ever seen him. He turned me out in disgrace. The nuns at the Pieta took me in for a while, but then I got sick and lost the baby. After that, the only thing I lived for was finding the man who'd betrayed me. It took a few months, but I finally tracked the old bastard to the Ca' Renaldo and began planning my revenge." A harsh cry sounded in her throat. "I killed Tartini just like he deserved, and there's not a damned thing you can do about it, Nicco. All you have is a scrap of paper that proves nothing."

I took a shuddering breath, reflecting on the millwheel of the criminal court that pulverized the wronged as completely as the evil. "I'm sorry," I said. "Truly sorry, Marina."

The window drapes parted just as the young harlot tossed her head and flounced toward the door. Bianchi stepped over the low windowsill that separated the balcony from my room. Messer Grande, red-robed and severe, followed. "I've heard enough, Ziani. My *sbirri* will take it from here."

I made myself go to the hanging. As Marina's cart trundled

across the jetty toward the gallows set up between the columns of the Lion and the Saint, I waved frantically, hoping she would see at least one caring face in the jeering crowd. It was not to be. Marina kept her chin lowered and eyes trained on her bound wrists.

After the hangman had tossed her small body onto the waiting charnel wagon and my bloodthirsty neighbors had gone home to their dinners, I wandered along the waterfront. On the lagoon, wavelets frisked in the summer breeze, and gulls made sweeping arcs against a cerulean sky. Venice was putting on her best show, but it barely registered with me. My heart ached as steadily as my knees and my shoulder. Perhaps I was getting too old to chase down ruffians and match wits with the vagaries of justice. I would never trade on the Ziani name as Carlo Pisani had suggested, but maybe, just maybe, I should find another line of work. One that would take me far from the Ca' Renaldo. ♡

THE MYSTERIOUS CIPHER

by Willie Rose

Each letter consistently represents another. The quotation is from a short mystery story. Arranging the answer letters in alphabetical order gives a clue to the title of the story.

PCL ZWMT LE VTHT, DBF WK FCTJB'K KDYT
ZCBU KC LBFTHJKDBF NVP IHWAT HDKTJ FHCE
ZWYT D JKCBT ICAT BCMTARTH. NWBKTH
KDYTJ KVT EZDIT CS IHWAT ...

—TMT SWJVTH

CIPHER:

ANSWER: A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

Solution on page 87

MYSTERIOUS PHOTOGRAPH



Susan Alinsangan / Graphistock

Anger Management?

We will give a prize of \$25 to the person who invents the best mystery story (in 250 words or less, and be sure to include a crime) based on the above photograph. The story will be printed in a future issue. Reply to AHMM, Dell Magazines, 475 Park Avenue South, New York, New York 10016. Please label your entry "December Contest," and be sure your name and address are written on the story you submit. If possible, please also include your Social Security number.

The winning entry for the June Mysterious Photograph contest will be found on page 138.

CAR TROUBLE

JAS. R. PETRIN

"This time," Skig said, "tell you what. Try not to make it stand up at the back, some kind of antenna sticking outta my head."

"It's just the way your hair goes, dear. Nothing I can do. You should be glad to have hair on the top of your head. Some men your age are ready for a comb-over."

"When I'm ready for it, shoot me."

Every month they exchanged this banter. Leo Skorzeny sitting on a straight-back chair in Eva Kohl's kitchen, a sheet around him, snippets of his stiff, iron-gray hair on the floor. Eva, retired from hairdressing maybe ten, twelve years now, click-clicking away with her scissors.

"Tell me about that new car you're buying," Skig said. He shifted his weight, trying to ease the pain in his gut.

She laughed. Took a playful snip at the empty air.

"Not buying—leasing. The way they explained it to me, Mr. Skorzeny, it's cheaper."

"Smaller payments."

"That's right."

"That don't mean it's cheaper. The long run."

"For me it is. It really is. The salesman told me I'm perfect for a lease. I put on hardly any mileage—mostly just shopping."

"You bargain down the suggested retail?"

"The what?" She stopped snipping, puzzled.

"The price."

"No. I thought I explained. I'm not buying, I'm leasing."

Skig closed his eyes, held them shut a second, opened them.

"You got a good trade?"

The snipping started again. "My old car still runs well. They're giving me two thousand dollars for it."

"Your old car's like new. Why not keep driving it?"

"It isn't all that good. And I feel like a change. Anyway, I've made up my mind. I'm signing the papers this afternoon." She ran the trimmer over his neck, cold steel humming against his skin, then handed him a fan-shaped hand mirror. She held a second mirror

behind his head, left, then right. "How's that?"

"Perfect," Leo said, "as always. That's why I come to you."

"Don't kid. You come here because I'm cheap. And I'm only just down the street from you."

Before he left, Skig got the name of her dealership.

He trudged heavily back along the sidewalk, one hand under his billowing sports coat to brace the pain there low in his gut. He would get his car out of the garage, head down to the quack's office, and collect the bad news sure to be waiting for him. All those tests last week. The quacks liked to tell him how lucky he was, that he should be dead by now. Yeah, right. How lucky could you get?

Skig lived in an old made-over filling station, bought years ago as an investment. He'd converted the office area to a few livable rooms after Jeanette died—couldn't stay in the house and didn't know why. Or maybe he did. Sensing her presence there was still too much for him, and at other times it was just too empty.

He crossed the large graveled lot, his front yard, fumbled a key out, and heaved open the repair bay door, all blistering paint: no power assist on this baby, built before the friggin' flood. He backed the Crown Vic into the lot, got out, and hauled the big door down, locked it, then eased back in behind the wheel. He rolled off along Railway Avenue at a sedate five clicks under the limit, windows open to blow the stink off. The Crown Vic still reeked after running off the jetty into the harbor one time, but Skig had no interest in replacing it. Why bother if you were one church service shy of a planting, the way he saw it.

The clock on the dash said two fifteen. Time enough for that one small matter before he had to be at his appointment.

He found the lot on Robie, not a first-rate dealership, but not too scuzzy a place. The showroom supported a colossal roof-mounted sign that said HAPPY DAN DUCHEK'S AUTO WORLD, with two sculpted Ds each the size of a grand piano. Another, smaller, sign said WE'RE NOT HAPPY UNTIL YOU ARE! "Right," Skig muttered as he turned in. He rolled slowly between two rows of gleaming new cars. Bigger than it looked from the street. There was even a detailing shop at the back for well-heeled car enthusiasts, Happy Dan covering all the angles. Skig saw movement in the next row over. An extremely pretty young woman, dressed for the office, talking heatedly with her hands to a young man in sagging-butt pants who stared back at her with lifeless eyes.

"Don't argue with that one, dear," Skig cautioned her under his breath, looking for a place to park. Something familiar about the guy.

He found Happy Dan in the manager's office. Shiny hair. Smile on him like it was wired there. Dan had just unwrapped a tuna sub on his desk and was holding out a coffee mug to the extremely pretty young woman Skig had seen a moment ago. She must have nipped inside while he was parking, now in the process of pouring Dan a fill of seriously black joe from a steaming Pyrex pot. Dan didn't look too happy with her. The guy with the sagging pants was nowhere in sight.

As he stepped into the room, Happy Dan met Skig's gaze, his open face brightening in cheery lines. "Good afternoon, sir. Welcome. Time for a new car?" He showed even white teeth.

"Name's Leo Skorzeny," Skig said flatly. "You heard of me?"

Happy Dan raked his memory. Concentrated. Then something clicked and his smile wilted. He set his mug down. "Yes, I've heard of you."

"We need to talk."

Leo then stared at the extremely pretty young woman until she took the hint and stalked out of the room, carafe in hand, trailing an aroma of burnt coffee.

Happy Dan edged around a filing cabinet and took up a defensive position behind his desk.

"We were trading stories about vacation resorts," Happy Dan said, with a nervous stab at affability. Silk tie. Gel in his hair like it was spooned on. "You see, I just got back from Aruba, and—"

"What I really come to see you about was the hose job you're planning to do on a nice old lady, Mrs. Eva Kohl, supposed to come in here later today an' sign some papers."

"Mr. Skorzeny, we don't—"

"Sit down," Skig said.

Happy Dan looked uncertain for a second, then sat. Skig lowered himself into the visitors' chair. Jeez, his gut hurt.

"The lady's a friend of mine. I want her treated right."

"Mr. Skorzeny, I assure you—"

Skig's shoulders moved, his big hands on the heavy desk, trapping Happy Dan against the wall. Dan's jaw sagged. Disbelief on his face.

Skig said, "There's not a car salesman alive wouldn't hose a woman like that, unless he's a saint, and you got no halo floatin' over your head." He watched Happy Dan turn purple. "Here's what you do. You come down fifteen hundred on the MSRP—cash-back covers that—an' you give her three, not two, for the trade, which is more what it's worth. That's forty-five hunnerd, good for ninety bucks off the monthly payment, an' you still do okay. An' don't suck it all up with some BS prepping fees, like you

polished the mirrors or something, or I'll be back here for more negotiating. You getting all this?"

Sweat droplets gleamed along the hairline of Dan's spiffy do. He managed a bob of his head. Skig held him there a few more seconds, scrutinizing the Aruban tan for signs of perfidy. Satisfied that there were none, he yanked the desk back and heaved himself to his feet.

"An' make sure she gets the free gap insurance the leasing company likes you to forget about," Skig said, not looking back, moving on out the door.

The clinic's parking lot was jammed as usual, the waiting room packed with distressed humanity. But there had been a cancellation, and Skig's name came up quickly. Shown to a room the size of a large closet, he waited until the quack breezed in. Not his usual quack. A specialist. Like most specialists, this guy had the charm of a forensic pathologist.

"Just tell me," Skig said, "am I still gonna die?"

The quack hunched over a child-sized table, briskly flipping through some arcane-looking charts. "We're all going to die, Mr. Skorzeny."

A pathologist *and* a philosopher. Skig crossed his brawny arms above his thick belly, waiting to hear the bad news.

Finally the quack glanced up. Jeez, he was young. How much could a kid this age know about diseases of the colon? Plenty, judging by the framed degrees, diplomas, and certificates tacked to the wall. But Skig wasn't impressed. Paper was paper.

"The tests were inconclusive," the quack said.

"What!"

"The tests were inconclusive. We'll have to run them again."

"Somebody screwed up, you mean."

"There's no need for acrimony."

"There's a need for something. You think it's happy days goin' through all that?"

"You're overwrought."

"No, I'm *underwrought*. When I get overwrought, you'll know it."

The quack was unintimidated. That impressed Skig. With cool detachment, the young man insisted Skig leave another sample for the lab. The Styrofoam container looked just like the kind the Greek at the corner sold his chili burgers in.

When Skig got home, there was company waiting. An unmarked car with two watchful dicks in it, parked in the front yard where the

gas pumps used to be. In his younger years he might have cruised on by, circled the block, gave some thought as to how he would handle things. Now he just rolled in and stopped right beside them. What were they after? Someone to shoot? Pick me, Skig thought.

They got out of their car slowly and purposefully, an air of menace hovering about them. Something they learned at the academy: how to get out of your vehicle with an air of menace. Skig got out too. As he straightened, the pain darted inside him like the tip of a cork puller he'd ingested by accident somehow, and he steadied himself.

The dicks were focused, professionally intense. The older one moved in. He was going to fat, wore an old loose-fitting suit, and showed salt-and-pepper hair around his ears. The one who'd been driving was younger, tall and lanky, and dressed like he was going to a job interview.

"You guys collecting for underprivileged cops?" Leo said. "I gave at the office," thinking of the container he had left with the quack. He brushed past the dicks, jangling his keys, and unlocked the repair bay door. When he heaved it up he thought his stomach would bust open and dump some major organ right there on the ground. He swayed.

"Mr. Skorzeny?" the fat one said.

"You know it."

"Are you all right?"

"Top shelf. Right up there with the chips and cheesies."

The dick studied him, taking his measure.

"We've got a few questions. Think we could go inside?"

"No."

The dick held his gaze. Then he shrugged. "Suit yourself." He took a pen and notebook out of his pocket, flipped pages, glanced up again. "You know a man named Dwight Keevis?"

"No."

"Owns a car dealership. Also goes by the name of Dan Duchek. Happy Dan."

"Oh, that Dwight Keevis."

"Then you do know him."

"No."

The dick pinched the bridge of his nose. "All right. Let's go about this another way. An employee says you dropped by to see Mr. Keevis earlier today, unannounced. You didn't come to buy a car, and you weren't very friendly. We'd like to know what you talked about."

"You asked if I knew the guy. I don't." Skig looked the two dicks over again. A mulish-looking couple of plugs. Stubborn as dirt. Better give them something. The truth was best. "I did stop by about a car. I been told I should trade up."

Behind the fat dick, the lanky one stooped over the window of the Vic. He made a sour face. "That might be a plan. This one stinks."

"Funny," Skig said, "it smelt good till you showed up."

The lanky dick's face tightened, and the older one reined him in with his eyes. Then the older one turned back to Skig.

"The employee claims you threatened Mr. Keevis when you left his office today."

"Is that what this is about? I said an unkind word to somebody?" Skig remembered the extremely pretty young woman, the acid look on her puss as she trip-trapped out of the room.

"Well," the dick said, "whether you did or you didn't, Mr. Keevis now happens to be dead. Died of gunshot wounds at the QE Emergency—" He glanced at his watch. "—going on two hours ago."

"You don't tell me."

"I do tell you. And after what the employee said, and seeing as you're not exactly a stranger to us—"

"Got a sheet on you like the Yellow Pages," the lanky dick put in with venom.

"—we thought," the older dick continued, determined to finish, "that it might be a good idea to come by and hear what you had to say about it."

"An' you did: An' I answered you," Skig said. "So take off."

"You won't get far with that attitude."

"I only need to get through that door to my bottle of scotch. You want to arrest me because some rip-off artist stopped a long overdue slug, go ahead. But my doctor may have something to say about that. And my lawyer will cut you off at the knees."

Skig got back in the Vic, dropped it in gear, and let the fast idle roll the smelly old car inside.

In the gloom of the kitchen, he rinsed a glass in the sink, rattled some ice into it, and topped it up with Teacher's. He pushed the news about Happy Dan around in his head. Not all that surprising. Probably tried to screw the wrong sap, that's all. The sap got wise, dug his howitzer out of a shoebox, and returned to the lot, bent on revising the terms of their understanding. The fat monthly payment and, oh yeah, a little something else.

Skig glanced at the clock. Solly Sweetmore was late. If he didn't show, Skig would have to go to him, give him a slap or two to get his attention.

He sat down in his ratty recliner—collapsed into it, was more like it. Switched on the TV, jabbed the mute button, took a quick slug from his glass. The liquor did what it was supposed to do, burned for a moment, then mellowed him, but it didn't help his

gut. He shook out two of the big fat brown capsules the quack had slipped him—samples, he'd said, take one before eating—and washed them down with a swallow of booze.

Then he closed his eyes.

When he opened them again, there were shadows in the room, the afternoon sun dying fast behind the fly-specked window over the sink. The light from the silent television winked and gamboled on the walls.

A TV news lady was doing a location shot. The background looked vaguely familiar. Skig frowned as two giant double Ds reared up on the screen—Dan Duchek's rip-off center. It was an earlier tape, sunlight beating down in the background where a bagged stiff was being rolled out on a gurney. He poked the mute button. The TV lady, brushing a sweep of lustrous hair out of her eyes, said, "... all police would reveal was that the owner of this downtown dealership was shot dead in his office by an unidentified assailant." Skig wondered if Dan still wore his grin. "CTV has learned that at least one person has been taken into custody..." The canned shot changed. And to Skig the monologue faded as a jerky camera lens zoomed in on a gray-haired woman being bundled into a police patrol car. The woman looked dazed. It was Eva Kohl.

"Ah jeez," Skig said.

He made a call to his lawyer Saul Getz, then rolled down to the cop shop in the Vic. Saul was there waiting for him. A thin man with patient eyes, he was thoughtfully stroking his trim, white goatee.

"You talk to her?" Skig asked.

"Yeah, I talked to her. They didn't arrest her. That woman wouldn't shoot a pop-gun at a plastic monkey to win a coconut."

"You got that right. You pry her loose?"

"Oh sure. She's an unhappy lady, though. Forensics impounded her car. Seems Happy Dan was about to drive it into the shop when the shooter stepped in and popped him. Two hits, one miss. Quite a mess." He smiled. "She's feisty. She says if the police take people's cars away, then they ought to provide loaners. I sent her home in a cab."

Skig said, "They recover the gun?"

"No. But they think it belonged to the victim. He kept a Smith in the desk, according to an employee, and the cops can't find it anywhere."

That helpful employee again. "Anything else?"

"One slug was recovered in pretty good shape. Went into the headrest. When they find the gun they'll do their ballistics thing, and that'll be it."

"They think."

"They're pretty sure. One of the techs took a quick look. He said it ought to be a slam dunk, far as the gun is concerned."

"Meantime, Eva doesn't get her car back."

"Oh, it gets worse. When I showed up and started speaking for her, the detectives figured out the connection pretty quick. I mean, from me to you, then Eva. They brightened a little. The younger one grinned and said maybe they'd bring her back in for more questioning."

"They're outta their minds."

"They seem a little miffed at you, Leo. Did you yank their chains or something?"

He told them how he had been at the lot for a few minutes and how the fat cop and the thin cop had stopped by and braced him later.

"Buying a new car, Skig? Hey, that's a plan."

"Don't start. I was there at the lot just before the guy got it, an' because I'm me, they made a little too much of it." Skig eyeballed a policeman stepping by them in the hall. "I ran them off."

Saul stroked his goatee, thinking. "No, there's more to it. They got that witness. That employee. We don't know what she saw, or what she says she saw. She could be fingering you *and* your friend." He puffed his cheeks out, gave his head a shake. "Did you rub her the wrong way too?" When Skig didn't answer, he added, "Why would she finger a nice old doll like that?"

"I dunno," Leo said, "but I'm gonna find out."

He had just caught a glimpse of the extremely pretty young woman being ushered out of an interview room down the hall.

The sun had gone down fast. Wisps of pink-bellied clouds lingered way out low over the Arm.

Skig sat in the Crown Vic with the blower on and the windows all the way down. The car smelled especially rank today. The sludge at the bottom of the harbor wasn't violets, that was a fact. But minutes later the night breeze was buffeting through the car again, as he trailed the extremely pretty young woman's taillights down Gottingen Street. She drove fast. She tailgated. She yapped into her cell nonstop.

She drove out to Clayton Park, sped north on Dunbrack, then turned in at a block of apartments that sprawled above the slope to the basin. Shot down the ramp into the underground parking with the phone still glued to her head. Skig found a slot outside in the visitors' lot, angled so that he could watch for an apartment light to go on. He knew he had about a fifty percent chance, and

his number came up. Tenth floor, northwest corner.

"Bang," Skig said.

He kept waiting. Imagined the cell phone burning. Minutes later, headlights lit the Vic from behind, a car coming up fast, flashing by him into the visitors' lot, subwoofer pumping out some irritating hip-hop crap. Nice car. A yellow Audi.

"Boom," Skig said.

Skig knew the vehicle. He'd seen it around. A car like that, you might as well have a neon sign over your head jabbing blinking arrows at you. And seeing it here now, Skig suddenly realized who the kid at the car lot had been, the one with the eyes.

The name he went by was Caesar DeLuca. His real tag? Probably not. He was Filipino. Smart with the ladies. Though what young women saw in guys who looked like extras from *Night of the Living Dead*, Skig had never been able to figure out. And DeLuca was mean. He liked to hurt people. It wasn't just an unavoidable part of doing business with him, he enjoyed it. Beyond that, Skig didn't know much about the guy and didn't want to. He couldn't care less what turned DeLuca's crank, but that would change fast if the guy had his rat's nose buried in this business somehow.

DeLuca swaggered from his car to the building, gold chains, body ink, and attitude. Skig considered the setup so far.

A car dealer shot dead. In his proximity, four people: a gentle unassuming older lady, the extremely pretty young woman, and rat boy here, Caesar DeLuca. And himself. Which of these was most likely to have had something to do with it? Since the cops apparently didn't know about DeLuca, Skig was number one on the list. But he had an alibi with the quack. The cops had probably discovered that. Which left the girl—and the older lady, of course, according to Fatty and Skinny. They had sherlocked it out.

Of course, they hadn't seen DeLuca nosing around the car lot earlier, but on the other hand they didn't seem too interested in finding out about him either. Had they asked Skig if he'd seen anybody else there? No. Had the girl volunteered the information? Skig didn't think so.

Upstairs, the window darkened. Somebody had pulled the drapes. After about half an hour, DeLuca sauntered out of the building and squealed away in his thumping pimp mobile. Skig eased out of the old Vic, locked the door, and followed a tenant and his fuzzy white dog in through the front entrance.

The apartment door on the tenth floor had a spray of dried flowers on it and a ceramic plaque that said RUSSELL. The girl pulled open her door and stared at him.

"Name's Leo Skorzeny, Ms. Russell," Skig said. "Remember me?"

Her face paled in alarm, she started to close the door, and he put his foot in the way.

"Tired of talking about what happened to your boss today?"

That stopped her. She hesitated, found that hissy look somewhere inside herself, then stood back and let him in. She waggled her fingers at a chair and flounced down on the sofa, one leg tucked up, lips clamped together tight. Skig didn't like the idea of fighting his way back out of the overstuffed bucket she had consigned him to, so he dragged a kitchen chair out of the ell and sat down gingerly on it. Jeez.

She shot a meaningful look at a table clock, something modern in plastic and glass. "You've got five minutes." She had a harsh voice. He hadn't been expecting that.

"I'll take it. I can use all the time I can get, according to my proctologist."

"Are you trying to be crude?"

"I'm trying to be accurate. You were pretty accurate yourself when you put those holes in your boss."

She brought one foot down hard on the rug, shoving forward at him. "Don't you *dare* imply I had anything to do with that!"

"I'm not implying it. I'm saying it. You shot him, all right, you or your boyfriend did. An' when you couldn't frame me, you had to settle for the old lady."

She jumped to her feet. "Get out!"

"I could do that. An' I could head back down to Gottingen Street and lay it all out for the dicks."

She stood there breathing, dainty nostrils flaring, considering her options. Then she plumped down on the sofa again and gnawed at her lip. He knew he was on the right track then.

"Fine," she said. "Let's hear your delusional idea."

"I got two, three of 'em," Skig said, ignoring the dramatics. "I been thinking down there in the car. First one is, you were cozy with Happy Dan, shining his cars for him, only somethin' went wrong. He took off to Aruba without you, had a good time in the sun, an' when he got back you tore a strip off of him."

She gave a short, barking laugh.

"That's insane. You don't know anything. What makes you think I wasn't with him?"

"Where's your tan?"

It stopped her. But just for a moment.

"Dwight was married. He flew down there with his wife. He couldn't have taken me along if he'd wanted to."

"Oh, there's ways. But we'll put that on hold. Here's delusion

number two, coming at it from the other side. The guy was hitting on you, you finally lost it with him, an' you pegged him."

"Oh puh-lease!" She made her eyes go round. "Why would I do that? I could have walked away if what you're saying is true. Do you think I'm out of my mind?"

Skig looked at her. She was struggling. A pretty bundle of raw nerves curled up there on the couch.

"No," he said, "I don't think that. I think your boyfriend's got a loose connection someplace. What's his part? He came to your rescue?"

"My boyfriend? Now what are you talking about?"

"The little weasel I just saw scuttling out of here."

She rolled her eyes again. "I don't even *have* a boyfriend. Nobody left here."

"He was in this building."

"It's a big place."

"Yeah," Skig said. He wasn't ready to mention he'd seen the two of them arguing earlier under the big double Ds at Happy's place. "Where can I find him?"

She studied Skig a moment. Worked on that lip again. She really didn't want to get going on DeLuca, that was obvious, and suddenly a miracle occurred. Her face turned all sweetness and light. Just like that.

"Look, we can be friends, you know."

"Sure."

"You don't think I'm cute?"

"Puppies are cute. So are Kewpie dolls. You're in there somewhere, I guess."

She threw her drink at him, the glass tumbling past his ear, splatting against the heavy drapes, then falling to the rug, miraculously unbroken. The drapes hadn't fared so well, a broad stain running down them. A few drops darkened Leo's sleeve.

He got up painfully. "Nice to have met you, Ms. Russell."

Two things he'd gotten out of this. Number one, she was scared of the cops. Number two, she was protecting rat boy.

Skig opened his eyes next morning and wondered where the hell he was. Found he was stretched flat out in his recliner. Last night after taking three of the big fat free samples, he had tumbled into Never-Never Land as if someone had batted him with a jack handle. He yanked the chair lever, sat up, and explored his side with his stubby fingers.

Not too bad this morning. The pain was still there, but it was biding its time. Sometimes it did that. Went away to a seminar on

how to really rip a guy's innards apart, then came back and practiced on him. The respite would be short.

He showered, ran his razor over his face, and went out the door without bothering to eat. He stopped at a drive-through for a coffee, double milk, no sugar, which he drank in the Vic at the edge of the lot. There was a contest on. Win a TV. Coffee cups had the good news hidden on them. A kid rooting through the trash can by the doors for a winning cup glanced up as Skig held his out the window. He edged over suspiciously and took it from him. "Jeez, mister. Don't you want to win a plasma TV?" Skig started up the Vic. "I already got a TV. I could prob'ly use the plasma, though."

Skig drove to the recycling depot out past Lakeside. A big Loadmaster trash truck was grunting up to the dock, spewing diesel fumes, and a bunch of cars stood around, engines idling while people hauled out bags filled with beer cans, newspapers—bags filled with bags, for crying out loud—to get their four or five bucks. Save the ozone layer. He found Solly Sweetmore in his upstairs office under the corrugated sheet-metal roof.

Skig was overweight. He needed to drop forty pounds. But Solly had such a colossal gut on him he had to straighten his arms to reach his desk. His face, tracked with broken blood vessels, showed alarm when he saw who his visitor was. He set down the can of Coke he was nursing.

"You were supposed to drop by yesterday," Skig said, wincing. The pain was back. The steep stairs killed him.

"I know, Leo, I know." The trashman leaned away from his desk, moving his hands around. "I just got busy. This place is a nuthouse. You can see—"

"Fine with me, Solly," Skig said, "you want to pay another day's juice. Go for it. Only next time tell me, okay? That's what the phone is for."

"About that, Skig, listen—"

"No, you listen. This is how things get outta hand. You keep taking more time, more time, you run outta time pretty fast. Then I got to lean on you. I don't like that, Solly."

"I know. I should've phoned you, Skig, but listen—"

A gaunt man in a knit cap interrupted, thrusting his small balding head in the door. "That compactor crapped out again, boss, the old green one, so maybe—"

Solly surged up and screamed at him. "Will you get outta my face?" He threw his pop at the man, the half filled can smashing into the doorframe, cola fizzing and splattering over a calendar and running down the cheap paneling in streams. The head withdrew.

"Lots of people throwing drinks these days," Skig said, shaking his head. "People need to relax." He tapped the book in his breast pocket. "Six-five, Solly, plus another half a point for today. Pay me now an' that's an end to it."

"But I got other bills."

"Not like mine you don't."

Solly threw his head back and let out an anguished moan. Then he jerked open a cashbox. Counted the six-five out right there on the desk.

"An' the half a point, don't forget," Skig said. Then he held up his hand. "Or maybe this'll work." He leaned in. "You know a guy named Caesar DeLuca? Drives a car like a birthday cake?" Warily, Solly nodded. Skig said, "Tell me about him."

Solly looked even more stressed out, if that was possible.

"What's to tell? I see him on Argyle there, Hollis Street, sometimes down at the casino. He's trouble."

"What kind of trouble?"

When Skig drove away fifteen minutes later, he had his money, and more information on Ceasar DeLuca than he needed. The kid was also in the car business. He and Happy Dan had that in common. He did custom work, prime merchandise only, a certain kind of car, a special customer. He got an order, shopped around till he filled it. Then—this part Solly was shaky on—he delivered the wheels out in Sackville, a guy with a long-haul business there. It got loaded on a semi, other stuff packed around it, and a day later it was in New York or Montreal, on its way to the special client.

Skig had said to Solly, "Rat boy. Where does he live?"

"I dunno. Nobody knows. He keeps that to himself."

"This merchandise. Always a special order?"

"Prob'ly not. He wouldn't walk away from something."

Skig thought a minute. "Get a message to him. There's an old Vette, one a them Sting Rays, been parking on the street all night behind the Armories. You don't know why. But you seen it there, an' you want a spotting fee."

Solly had shaken his fleshy face. "Jeez, I dunno, Leo."

"Just do it." Skig shifted his weight. "Do it an' we'll call it square on the point."

"Fine. But I don't like it," Solly said. "I'm telling you that guy is a crazy man."

Back home, Skig dialed Saul Getz. "They pick her up? Eva Kohl?"

"No, of course not. What case have they got? But they're thinking about it."

"Why?"

"Something about her being a suicide risk."

"They're full of it."

"I'm with you. She doesn't look the type. A little bewildered maybe, but who wouldn't be?"

"Whatever happened to a free country?"

"Things are relative, Leo."

"Things are crap. Listen, do what you can for her. They pull her in, I want you there with her."

"Leo, this is costing you. It's adding up fast."

"Just do it. An' don't bring me into it. She thinks she owes me, that's bad for a friendship. It changes things."

"Yeah, well, she is starting to wonder."

"Just be there for her. Say you're court appointed or something. Make somethin' up, you're a lawyer, for cryin' out loud."

"Fine, but I've got to bill you."

"So cheer up." Skig winced. The pain was back. "One more thing. I need to borrow your Vette."

There was dead silence. Then Saul started breathing again.

"You *what*?"

"I know it's your toy, you only drive it to church on Sunday, but tonight I want you to park it behind the Armories, take a cab home, an' forget about it."

"You're not serious."

"Anything happens to it, I'll pay the shot. You know I'm good for it."

There was a short pause. Then Saul said, "You're up to something."

"Go see Mrs. Kohl."

Skig spent the rest of the day at the clinic. The lousy tests all over again. When he got home that evening he felt as if he was a sample of something himself. He ate beans, cold out of the can, and washed them down with scotch, both food items totally forbidden to him. To hell with it. Then he set his alarm clock—the blender plugged into the timed outlet on the stove—and fell into his recliner. He dreamed Fatty and Skinny, dressed like surgeons, were stooping over him, making a large incision in his belly and smiling about it.

The alarm was howling in the kitchen, the empty blender dancing around on the metal stovetop like it was going to explode. Midnight.

He limped out the door.

He parked one street over from the Armories where through the gap of a vacant lot he could eyeball Saul's money-pit Vette—a '65 fastback, Nassau Blue. Tilted the Vic's power seat back until only his eyes showed above the dash.

He dozed a few times, and then something woke him. The clock read one fifteen. A tow truck was backing toward Saul's ride. It stopped and rat boy got out, gold chains flashing under the sodium streetlamp. He held something down low at his side that looked for a second like a long-barreled handgun. It was a cordless drill with a foot-long bit in it. Rat boy put the bit to the fiberglass fender and sank a hole into the Vette's engine compartment. An old trick. Drain the battery. That way the alarm wouldn't sound unless there was a backup.

There wasn't. Something to mention to Saul. The guy hooked up the Vette and dragged it away. Elapsed time, three minutes. Skig readjusted his seat and took off after him.

Rat boy would have places to store his cars, places where he could keep them out of sight for a while. Rented garages here and there, probably. After a ten minute drive out to Spryfield, the tow truck halted before an old swayback shed. The kid was good with the boom and the winch, and the Vette was tucked out of sight in no time.

The rat dropped off the truck—another darkened house a few blocks south—hopped in the Audi, and beat it out of town along Purcell's Cove Road, stereo thumping all the way, a good night's work behind him. Skig gave him room, not wanting to spook him. Maybe too much room. He came over a hill near Herring Cove, overshot the place, and had to double back. Good thing he'd been watching the drives on either side, and caught a flash of brake lights and yellow paint.

The rat appeared to be doing all right for himself. It was a modern chalet in bleached cedar, overlooking the ocean. In need of some TLC but pretty fine all the same. Skig took the Vic back up the hill to a market gardener's he'd spotted, parked in the darkened lot by the greenhouse, got out, and walked back. A short stroll, no more than two hundred yards or so, but on a steep incline. His gut wasn't happy about it.

Partway up the drive to the house, Skig stopped. There were two cars here. The Audi and, in front of it, the car he had followed from the cop-shop the previous night. He grunted. It was the car of the extremely pretty young woman.

"No boyfriend, huh?" Skig said.

He heard voices.

The house stood on a brutally unaccommodating chunk of

granite, cantilevered over the cliff face to provide a picture-perfect view of the sea. A wide deck embraced it. In the quiet gaps when the surf wasn't pounding, voices drifted from the seaward side.

Skig climbed three broad steps to the deck. Against the house were some sturdy-looking loungers, a plastic cooler filled with ice and beer. Skig helped himself to a beer and sat down on a bench. He pressed the cold can to his side. From here he could make out the voices better.

"... I brought the beer like you told me, but I didn't think you'd be here this soon," the girl's voice said.

"I told you two, two thirty."

"Yes, but you're never early."

"What's the late-breaking news, it couldn't wait till tomorrow?"

A wave heaved in. "A man came to see me."

"What man?"

"The man I told the cops about—you know who I mean."

"The guy who threatened your boss?"

"Yes."

"So what did he want?"

"He accused me of killing Dwight."

Another pause in the conversation. The guy deliberating. Down below the house a big wave thundered in. Skig could smell the salt.

"Lemme guess. He thinks he can blackmail you."

"No. That's the funny thing. He just made these crazy accusations, then left. I thought about it all day and finally decided I'd better tell you about it."

"This happened yesterday?"

"Yeah. In the evening. Just after you left." She hesitated. "I think..." Her voice trailed off.

"You think what?"

"I think he knows something about you. I mean, he asked me where he could find you, and— Stop that! You're hurting me!"

"You waited all this time to tell me?"

"Let go of me!"

There was a scuffle, a muffled slap.

Skig swished his beer around, took another swallow. Then he got up. He walked around to the front of the house and saw him there, rat boy, staring down at the girl. She was crouched on the deck against the railing, one hand to the side of her face.

The guy must have seen her eyes move. He spun around in surprise.

"Name's Leo Skorzeny," Skig said. "You heard of *me*?"

"Where the hell'd you come from?"

"You heard of me?"

"Yeah, I hearda you. Some kinda shy. You heard of me?"

"Yeah. Some kinda rat." Skig looked at the girl. There was a red welt blossoming along one side of her face. Her nose was bleeding. His eyes moved back to the rat, and he shook his head. "What's the matter with you?"

The dead eyes narrowed, and Skig followed their quick shift to a pile of split wood near the door. A weapon on this guy's mind. A hatchet, maybe.

"Don't even think it," Skig said, "'less you want to wear the thing. Walk around with it stickin' outta you, some kinda new body piercing."

"You talk tough."

"It's the mileage," Skig said. "Want to hear what I got?" He finished the beer and set the can down carefully on the railing. "One part of Happy's business, he had that detailing place out back of the lot. The way I figure it, somebody goes through the records there, they can find out who owns what in town. All the good stuff. The best rides. Cars you don't see on the street too much. Practically a catalogue to a guy like you."

"So what."

"You come onto Ms. Russell here so you can get your nose in those records." The girl was getting to her feet. Dawning realization on her face, eyes jumping from Skig to rat boy. "Pretty soon, Happy Dan's customers lose a car or two. Maybe a string of them. Happy Dan is scratching his head. Then one day he finds you goin' through his records, your rat's nose twitching, an' he calls you on it. Or no, more likely the girl's doin' it. He threatens to call the cops. You can't have that."

The dead eyes didn't waver.

"There's some shouting. Some more threats. He has to step out to start processing the old lady's trade, an' the girl calls you up, panicking. You panic too. She tells you where the gun is, or she told you about it before. You're back in a minute, an' you use it to make those big holes in the guy."

The rat edged closer to the woodpile. A car started out back of the house. Skig looked for the girl again, but she was gone. He shrugged.

"What you gonna do? I think the girl figures it out. She remembers me sorting out her boss, an' she's thinking—some nutty idea in her head—that she can put the jacket on me. It's a long shot, but it's all you got. An' it turns out I got an alibi. Then there's the gun. You screwed that up too. Not likely I'd pop somebody with their own gun. Not my style. An' bein' a thief it's really tough for you to give up a perfectly good Smith.

I bet you still got it. The gun ties you to it."

By this time DeLuca had sidled halfway across the deck, and now he dived for the open door. Skig moved to block him. He saw what DeLuca was reaching for—not the woodpile but something else, his hand thrusting into the room and coming out with the gun. It must have been on the kitchen counter.

Skig brought the heel of his fist down on the rat's arm so hard he heard something pop and rat boy screamed. The gun clattered over the boards. The rat's bony knee came up, and a huge pain shot through Skig's belly. Skig reeled backward, left hand clenched in the rat's shirt, pulling the rat with him as the knee came up again. A wave of nausea. Skig was going down. He grabbed handfuls of the rat's baggy pants with both fists and heaved, putting his shoulders into it. The jolt hammered all the way up his spine when his butt struck the deck, and he sat there a moment, dazed, chunky legs splayed out, hand pressed to his side. There was one good thing though. Rat boy was gone. A flying header over the railing, sixty feet down to rocks and pounding surf.

Boom.

After a bit, Skig got up and put the gun back on the kitchen counter, careful how he touched it.

"You gonna be all right?" Skig asked Mrs. Kohl.

"I'll be just fine, Mr. Skorzeny. Go ahead to your doctor's appointment."

"He can wait. I'm more worried about you. Somethin' happens, who's gonna cut my hair?"

Skig helped her settle into her glider rocker. She smiled up at him.

"That Mr. Getz is an awfully nice man. He's helped me a lot. I was relieved when he told me the police figured out who killed Mr. Duchek. He was a nice man too." Then she frowned. "Mr. Getz isn't very happy with you, though. Something about a car?"

"Could be."

"Cars are an awful lot of trouble."

"They are for some people."

"I'm going out again tomorrow to see if I can lease one."

Skig was silent a moment, then said, "You want some company this time?"

A bright laugh. "You're afraid I'll get cheated. Men have an easier time of it at car lots than women do, is that it?"

"Lemme think about that one," Skig said. ♣

DEAD OF WINTER

CATHERINE MAMBRETTI

In Jamestown they called the winter of 1609 "The Starving Time." My Indian slave master called it "No Bird Winter" because no birds nested that winter in the marshlands around Chesapeake Bay. But I remember it as the winter when I was seventeen and accused of murder.

As usual, that autumn the birds had come from the north. They cloaked the sun in their wings and cast vast shadows on the leaf-gold land, as if Almighty Okeus' hand were casting a blessing on the Powhatan people. Then Okeus withdrew his blessing. At dawn on the day of the first snowfall, the birds began to leave the brittle reeds and to fly on farther south, as if they knew this would not be a good place to spend the winter. Dawn after shivering dawn, the hunters watched their winter comforts fly farther south. Everyone knew what would happen as clearly as their shaman Araparedhunt had years ago foreseen the coming of the Floating Islands. There would be no bird flesh that winter for their stews, no tiny bones for their children's toy whistles, no feather capes to warm their wives.

Day after day it snowed, until the drifts were too deep for the longest-legged deer. Then the snow stopped as the cold cascaded down from the north—a cold so cold that the wide James River froze over and every drop of moisture vanished from the air.

The English were always hungry in Virginia. That is why the officers sold me and a handful of other ships' boys to the Indians for corn almost as soon as we landed in 1607. But in the winter of 1609 they almost starved to death. Before long all they had to eat were old boots and thrice-boiled horse bones. No Indians died of hunger and cold, though, in "No Bird Winter." The great emperor Powhatan did not let his people suffer. Before the birds abandoned the land, he was already prepared. His storehouses were packed with bearskins, smoked oysters, *char-kee*, walnuts, maize, and other riches. No Indians died, that is, until late March, when my master Araparedhunt (known as Redhunt to his friends) sent me to spy on Jamestown. He was sure they had



nothing left to eat except each other, and he wanted me to find out who had survived.

That was how I got into trouble. By the time I reached Jamestown, the commanding officer had decided to "consent" to marry Powhatan's daughter in return for some corn. Captain Percy ordered me to carry his marriage proposal back to the Emperor Powhatan. Apparently he did not know, or did not care, that Princess Pocahontas was already married to a warrior named Kokoum.

Then, to make matters worse, just before dawn on my way back from Jamestown to Powhatan's winter headquarters at Orapakes, I ran into Kokoum.

One minute I was alone—the forest silence broken only by the tinkle of icicles as my fringed sleeves brushed the tree limbs—and the next minute the air was filled with the crunch of another human approaching me in the snow.

"What are you doing here?" he asked suspiciously.

I was afraid to tell him about the English Cutthroat's proposal to steal his best wife, so I said, "I'm on an errand. What brings you out so early?" We stood there struggling to ignore the bitter cold, slapped our arms, and pressed our stiff, gloved hands into our armpits.

"Hunting." Kokoum's sharp eyes had spotted a bird in the twilight sky the night before. "First sign of spring. I expect another sky today as bright as an English steel pickax," he said. "It's still too cold for snow."

"Cuppeh," I agreed.

Kokoum turned away. I watched him head off toward the east. His snowshoes punched no holes in the deep, crusted snow. I had no snowshoes, and when I turned toward Orapakes, my leggings disappeared up to my knees.

Little did I know—this was the last time Kokoum would be seen alive.

When I reached the village two hours later, I went straight to my master's warm *yehawkans*, where the aroma of breakfast succotash beckoned me. There I found Redhunt reclining on a bed of mink skins clad only in a breechcloth. He reminded me of a mountain lion on a hot boulder. When I gave him Percy's message, his expression did not change. He just stroked his beloved little green and yellow snake, curled asleep in a basket beside him.

"Powhatan and Pocahontas will understand," he said. "There's no benefit to us in this. It's not an offer of friendship. Cutthroat marriages degrade the women." He took the snake out of its basket and draped it around his neck to feed it a tidbit of fat. "Pocahontas has

the right to exchange Kokoum for Percy if she pleases, but I doubt she will. Be prepared to take him a polite refusal." A princess like Pocahontas could leave her husband whenever she wanted.

After that, I heard no more about the Cutthroat proposal. But when Kokoum did not come home after three long, cold nights, the village did begin to gossip. So Pocahontas, who was as skillful a tracker as any man, went on the fourth day to look for her husband. That was the day it snowed for the first time since the bitter cold had driven all clouds from the sky above Chesapeake Bay. It was what we had longed for, but by noon it was a blizzard, and we worried that Kokoum and Pocahontas might get lost in it.

The next afternoon the storm let up. I was in Redhunt's *yehawkans* when Pocahontas burst in gasping for breath. Her moccasin soles were slick with ice, and her legs were rubbed raw from her snowshoe straps. Little icicles clung to her fringed cape. When she pulled it off, the leather crackled. Even the fringe of black hair across her forehead was beaded with ice, which melted and streaked her cheeks like tears as she knelt to warm herself at Redhunt's fire.

"Great shaman," she pleaded, "find my husband's murderers." She looked up at Redhunt with eyes as black and hard as obsidian.

"Murderers?" The word shot through me like an arrow of ice. I wasn't about to admit it then, but I knew I must have been the last person to see her husband before he was killed—last except for his killers.

"What happened?" asked Redhunt, as if nothing were more common than for frantic princesses to interrupt his meditations like that.

"I found Kokoum's body in the snow," she said. "Near the Great Fertile Swamps. Skull pierced. An English pike, I'm sure of it. Someone crept up behind him, and there had to be more than one man."

I knew the area she meant. All around Chesapeake Bay and the shore of the Great Salty Waters were lush swamps. The English called these places the Great Dismal Swamps, but the Indians—who better understood the land—called them the Great Fertile Swamps. Like all hunters, Kokoum had secret bird blinds there.

Redhunt tensed ever so slightly. "Signs of a struggle?"

"Yes. He was still clutching his bow. He must have wounded one of his attackers. About a hundred feet away I found a blood-covered boulder."

"You're a good tracker. Even in a blizzard you should have been able to tell where the killers came from and where they went."

"I looked everywhere. They left no trail. As if they had wings—no footprints anywhere."

"Not even Kokoum's snowshoes?"

"Only faint marks," she said. "It was hard to follow his tracks. They were covered by snow. I found no others there."

"How is that possible?" I asked.

Redhunt and Pocahontas stared at me for a moment. Then Pocahontas shook her head and drew a charcoal map for Redhunt on some birch bark.

"You're certain the snow didn't bury the killers' tracks?" he asked.

"Do you question my eyesight? But they could have escaped through the frozen swamp without leaving tracks."

"Only if the ice had thawed, and the killers would have soaked their feet in icy water," I said.

Pocahontas frowned at me but nodded.

"True. The swamp is still covered in snow." Redhunt sucked thoughtfully on his long-stemmed pipe, then blew a perfect ring of smoke and said, "You came straight back here, following the same path as before? Saw no signs of anyone else in the woods?"

"I found your slave's tracks. They crossed Kokoum's about half a morning from here." Her eyes clouded, like deep pools suddenly glazed with ice. "It must be Percy and the Cutthroats. Who else could it be?"

"The Monacans, that's who," I said. They were the Powhatans' mortal enemies—a savage race who lived in the western mountains.

Redhunt was inexplicably patient with me in those days. He didn't reprimand me for interrupting, just shrugged and turned to Pocahontas. "I agree with you that the English are the only ones foolish enough to wade through the swamp in winter, but I can't believe they would attack one of our warriors when they badly need Powhatan's help."

She laughed bitterly. "I thought you would want to help me catch the murderous Cutthroats, not defend them. It's time to drive them home to England, once and for all."

"It's hard to understand how there could be no tracks," said Redhunt. "Especially clumsy Englishmen. I need to see this strange place where men can fly and wade through frozen-solid water."

That night the people of Orapakes slept uneasily in their mink beds, haunted by nightmares of savage man-slayers roaming Chesapeake Bay's rime-covered shores. The next morning, the rumors began to fly. Most villagers blamed the Cutthroats. They gave me the evil eye and reminded each other that I was once English. The only thing that saved me from the gauntlet was that

Redhunt made Pocahontas promise to keep my secret: No one else knew I had met Kokoum in the forest that evil dawn.

The emperor Powhatan agreed that Redhunt should investigate Kokoum's murder. He warned me that if the English had done it, I could expect to pay the ultimate price and he would burn Jamestown to the ground. Then he gathered an entourage to accompany Pocahontas and prepare the body for burial. I was to pull the supply sled—this time wearing snowshoes like everyone else. Despite the peril of the journey, Kokoum's oldest sister and sole heir, Kasha, insisted on joining us, as did Kokoum's second-best wife, Aguasquaw. Kasha was Kokoum's heir, not Pocahontas, because inheritance passed from parent to children in birth order, regardless of whether they were male or female.

From the moment we left Orapakes that morning, we were all on edge. The slightest noise along the path produced a dozen taut bowstrings and a dozen sharp eyes squinting down a dozen arrow shafts. I blame this edginess for what happened next.

Amocis, the guard at the end of the procession, started the trouble. Jiggling the rattlesnake tails in his hair, he said, "I don't know why you're all so afraid of a Cutthroat ambush. They're cowards. They'd only ambush a lone hunter."

"That's right, Amocis," said Aguasquaw, "the Cutthroats killed Kokoum, but they could only have found his secret bird blind if someone here betrayed him. Who told them where to find my husband?" She pointed her finger at me. I stopped dead in my tracks. Then she turned on Kasha in her thick gray fox robe. "Or you! You could have had Kokoum killed before he could father any children to disinherit you."

"How do we know Ward-no-tuak himself did not kill our friend?" Amocis shouted. (My name is Edward, but the Powhatans called me Ward-no-tuak.) "This slave was in the woods the day Kokoum went hunting. Ward-no-tuak could have followed Kokoum and killed him."

"Why would my slave do such a thing?" Redhunt asked calmly.

"He's English," said Amocis. "Besides, the Cutthroat Percy must have known that Pocahontas' husband would be dead soon—killed by this slave. That's why he wasn't afraid to offer marriage to her."

Then Kasha laughed—a laugh like a tomahawk whacking a rotten tree trunk. "If you want to know who had a reason to kill my brother, look to his best wife." She glared at Pocahontas. "How do we know that Kokoum was already dead when she found him?"

I was so shocked that I dropped the sled onto the riverbank and had to scramble to keep it from sliding onto thin ice.

"That's impossible. Even Pocahontas isn't that bad," said Aguasquaw. "Kokoum loved her best of all his wives. Night after night they shared the same bed. I should know." She frowned at the memory. "She would have borne him many children, and her children would have inherited all his wealth. Instead of you." Aguasquaw shook her finger in Kasha's face. "That's why you had him killed, you wretched, greedy woman!"

Amocis put a comforting arm around Aguasquaw's shaking shoulders. "I agree with Aguasquaw. Other than the English, Kasha benefits most from Kokoum's death. But it wouldn't have taken her much to bribe this slave to kill her brother."

All eyes turned to me.

"Oh, is that so? No one else benefits but his wives who are both free now to remarry." Kasha glanced smugly at Pocahontas and then back at Aguasquaw and her protector, Amocis.

Redhunt might have ignored a mere second-best wife like Aguasquaw, but Kasha was a *werowansquaw* too important to ignore. He stood for a moment with his arms crossed on his chest, no doubt reading Kasha's mind. Her tiny foxlike eyes looked back at him unblinkingly from beneath her fur hood. "And why would Pocahontas kill her husband?" he asked.

"She longs for an Englishman," Kasha said, with contempt in her voice as thick as frozen sap. "Pocahontas craves the tickle of their furry chests and bearded faces. She always fawned over Captain Smith the way a she-bear fawns over a cub. No doubt she sent Ward-no-tuak to Jamestown with word that she could get them some corn if one of them would marry her. But the Cutthroats don't believe in marrying a woman who already has a husband. I hear that English women can't even leave husbands who beat them."

Struggling to drag the sled back up the embankment, all I could hear of Redhunt's quiet response was, "I am the one who sent Ward-no-tuak to Jamestown, not Pocahontas."

Pocahontas laughed. "The last person I would trust with such a message is a Cutthroat boy."

At dusk we finally reached Kokoum's secret hunting spot near the Great Fertile Swamps. The squabbling had distracted us from thinking about what we would find when we got there. But as soon as we saw the bloated shape sprawled on the ground, the bickering stopped.

His body lay in the shadows of a velvety, snow-laden spruce surrounded by a knot of spindly pines. Majestic icicles dangled from every branch, like jeweled earrings. From there a hunter could see in all directions without being seen. But it was odd, I thought, that anyone could have seen Kokoum crouching there—especially

someone who did not know this was his favorite place. I wondered if anyone but Pocahontas knew about it.

Redhunt ordered us to camp behind the bird blind so as not to disturb the ground around the body. "Tomorrow we'll search for signs of his killer."

Despite a circle of guards, no one slept well that night except Redhunt, who never lost sleep for any reason. Every few minutes during the night some nervous woman started up out of her sleep and stared into the darkness beyond the campfire—at the sound of nothing more than cracking ice or the rustle of a black English rat in the brush. I know this because my eyes never shut. I didn't want the last thing I ever heard to be the sound of Amocis's war-club thudding into my skull.

I had to get up once to relieve myself, and I noticed a woman's figure kneeling over the sleeping Pocahontas. Whoever it was saw me, stood, and stepped outside the ring of firelight. I assumed she, too, had to relieve herself.

At dawn Redhunt began his search for clues. He moved like a deerstalker. His moccasins left no imprint. Returning to the spot where the rest of us waited, Redhunt said, "The winter has painted a picture of what happened here, as clear as black charcoal on white birch bark. There—Kokoum's snowshoes left tracks leading to the bird blind. And there are Pocahontas'."

He looked back at Kokoum's body. "Follow me, but not all the way into the bird blind. Stand back."

The ground was frozen solid, and it suddenly occurred to me that the killers could have crossed the frozen swamp without walking—on London steel blades like those I wore as a child on the frozen Thames. "What about ice skates?" I asked.

"Did any of your Cutthroat friends bring such toys from London?" he asked, curling his lip ever so slightly. Redhunt knew all about the English and their strange ways.

I thought not and shook my head. I recalled how few possessions I was allowed to bring with me from home.

"Notice how black and bloated Kokoum's body is," he said. Indeed, it was barely recognizable as a man's. Like everything else, his body was coated in ice.

Pocahontas gasped. "He wasn't that color when I found him beneath the snow."

"The cycle of melting snow and ice on sunny days, followed by freezing nights, did this," said Redhunt. "His flesh is frozen now, but it will thaw by noon."

It struck me then there was no smell of death. Winter had frozen it right out of the air.

Redhunt crouched down beside the body and stared long and hard at the wound in Kokoum's skull. Then he took a long turkey quill from his shoulder pouch and stuffed it into the wound as far as it would go. Before withdrawing it, he marked the feather with his fingernail.

Even from where I stood several yards away, the wound appeared to be about the diameter of an English pike, just as Pocahontas had said. "Maybe the killer was already hiding up in a tree before Kokoum got here," I said. Redhunt glared at me. After that I did not pursue this line of inquiry.

"Did you move his body?" he asked Pocahontas.

She shook her head, unable to utter the simple word "*mattah*," no.

Cautiously he touched the bow still grasped in Kokoum's bloated hand. Then he looked around at the bird blind. A brace of swans and geese lay near the body. "Kokoum was a good shot."

"Better than me," Amocis said hastily, as if Redhunt had accused him. "But the birds look rotten." Like the warrior's, their carcasses had frozen and thawed several times. "I wouldn't eat them."

"I wager a starving Englishman would," I said. After all, I had seen what they were reduced to eating in Jamestown.

Redhunt looked at me but said nothing. Next he examined Kokoum's quiver and counted the arrows. "One is missing. Did you find an arrow?" he asked Pocahontas.

"*Mattah*," she said.

"Show me the bloody boulder. The rest of you, keep away from the body. Do not follow us."

The two made their way gingerly through the swamp, parting clumps of reeds. A few times they plunged through the ice into the water. Around them alarmed birds flew up, hiding them briefly behind a curtain of rising and settling white wings. Redhunt stooped to study something. It would be extremely difficult, I thought, even for Redhunt to find signs of a killer's trail out there.

At last, they climbed up on a boulder.

"What are they looking at?" asked Kasha.

"A Monacan enemy's blood," I said, to turn suspicion away from myself and the other English. "Redhunt can tell their blood from ours."

Amocis eyed me suspiciously. "Oh? And English blood?"

"It wasn't Englishmen," I said.

Redhunt picked something up. Then the two made their way back to us. Without a word, Redhunt walked to the campfire. His moccasins and leggings were soaked. He looked like a tired wolf—ready to snarl at the first person who dared to speak. He sat down

abruptly and pulled off his moccasins to warm his frozen feet at the fire. Pocahontas did the same. We crowded around them.

Reading our minds, Redhunt held up a long black flight feather.

"From the Monacan's warlock!" I said.

"Is that what logic tells you?" Redhunt asked, disappointed in me. "I found no signs of any man fleeing through the swamp. Granted, the very best hunter couldn't track a giant elk out there right now. Even so, I don't believe Kokoum's killer escaped through the swamp."

"But how did the killer escape without a trace?" said Pocahontas. "What's the meaning of the bloody boulder? Did some wounded enemy step on it to throw a warclub that struck Kokoum in the back of his skull? It seems impossible."

"It is."

"But the blood?" she persisted.

"Kokoum always hit his target," said Redhunt. "His hand still clutches the bow, but his arrow was loosed at something on the boulder, probably the instant before he died. From the body's position, it's clear the death blow could only have come from one direction. That direction is not the swamp." Again he held up the black feather. "Is not Kokoum's killer plain to see?"

I stared at my cold feet, afraid to catch someone's accusing eye fixed on me. Kasha looked at Pocahontas, who stared back at her. Aguasquaw covered her face in her hands. Amocis looked at me.

"Who but the Cutthroat English would be so cowardly?" Pocahontas asked.

Amocis spat at me.

"I grant you, the English are not to be trusted," said Redhunt. "But as Ward-no-tuak said, the English are so hungry they would have stolen Kokoum's game. Besides, it would have taken more than trickery for a clumsy Englishman to get close enough to drive a pike into Kokoum's skull and then leave without a trace. No Monacan's snowshoes, and certainly no Englishman's boots, could have walked up to the bird blind without leaving a mark."

"It was a demon, then?" I blurted out.

"Of course not," said Kasha, "Kokoum's killer did leave tracks—Pocahontas' tracks."

In the shocked silence, all I heard were tiny icicles tinkling to the ground in the bird blind a few feet away. No one wanted to admit it, but Kasha's logic was good. The only person besides Kokoum who walked around the bird blind was Pocahontas.

And then a rare thing happened. For one fleeting instant, Redhunt let his anger show. Even brave Amocis took a step back in fear.

"You're fools. Pocahontas had no reason to kill Kokoum. She could have left him for Percy if she had so desired," he said. "But, Kasha, you stood to become immeasurably wealthy if your brother died childless. And you, Aguasquaw, it looks as if you preferred Amocis over your husband, but had no excuse to leave him. He was good man, didn't beat you. And, Amocis, you coveted Aguasquaw. Besides, there's unmistakable proof of Pocahontas' innocence. Kokoum was dead when she found him." He sighed wearily.

"Snow fell on Kokoum's body before Pocahontas got here. Even before she reached the swamp. Her tracks in the snow prove that. There is no snow on the body now because it melted in the sun. Kokoum died before it snowed."

Then Redhunt pointed to the icicle-covered spruce, whose branches sheltered the body. The icicles focused the sun's rays like hundreds of burning-glasses.

"Watch, my friends," he said. "Kokoum's killer is about to reveal himself—in the bird blind."

Kasha gasped. Amocis snapped the bow off his shoulder and readied an arrow. Aguasquaw clutched her arms around herself. Pocahontas took a step toward the bird blind.

A sharp crack sounded. A branch high in the spruce dipped and swayed, as if something had brushed it. From the shower of snow and ice, a black swan rose into the air, an arrow dangling from its breast. The bird struggled up into the clear blue sky, where its white companions now were flying north. But it could not reach them. It dipped and glided and finally came to rest again far out in the swamp. A black shadow in the brittle reeds.

Then a crash near the body drew our eyes back to the bird blind, where a giant icicle pierced the earth like a spear.

"Stay clear!" warned Redhunt. He retrieved the icicle and held it up toward the sun. In my mind's eye I could see its big brother crashing down on Kokoum's skull.

"You mean that Kokoum wasn't murdered," I said. "An icicle killed him."

"Of course. Would you prefer to believe that Kokoum foolishly allowed Monacans or Englishmen to trick him? No. Just when Kokoum wounded the swan, some other bird landed in the spruce, shaking the branches. It wouldn't be the first time falling ice impaled a man."

I thought that Kasha and Amocis and Aguasquaw must be ashamed to realize how wrong they had been. For my part, I was suddenly relieved of the burden of suspicion, which, like heavy snow, had weighed on me for hours.

"Kokoum must have been so enthralled by the sight of the rare black swan that he let down his guard, forgot about the sun warming the branches above him. He knew better than to expose himself to falling ice, but even a wily hunter can grow careless celebrating the end of a 'No Bird Winter.'"

That winter lived forever in our memories. I was sent back to Jamestown, where I became a translator. Kasha inherited Kokoum's wealth. Amocis married Aguasquaw. The emperor Powhatan, of course, never responded to Captain Percy's absurd proposal. And Pocahontas, as you may have heard, eventually married an Englishman, but not because she wanted to be tickled by his beard. It was part of her plan to conquer the English—a plan that failed only because she died in London, hacking up blood. Or so the Cutthroats claimed. 🦋

HOW TO SOLVE AN ACROSTIC

Using the definitions, fill in as many words as you can in the column on the right. Then transfer the letters from the column to their corresponding places in the diagram. A black square in the diagram indicates the end of a word. When completed, the diagram will yield a mystery-themed quotation. The initial letters of the words in the righthand column spell out the name of the author and the work from which the quote was taken.

MANDELBROT'S PATTERNS

KEITH MCCARTHY

The phone's call was magnified by the dark of the night, a demanding intrusion that was not going to be ignored.

First there was a sigh, then a hand reached out for the phone and a deep, almost husky male voice asked, "Yes?" There was a pause. "Yes, that's right . . . Where?" Another of the same. "Who?" This with some interest. "You're sure? . . . Okay." Once more, nothing was said, before, "No, don't worry. I'll contact her. I think she's visiting her mother."

The phone was placed back on its stand and there was silence again, as if the room were empty.

Then softly . . .

"Trouble?" This voice was female.

"Dead woman. Found in the bath. Apparently her wrists were slit."

"Suicide? What's it got to do with us?"

"It's Kate Reed, the wife of Dr. Phil Reed."

For the first time, there was a sense of interest in the room.

"Reed? The forensic pathologist?"

"The same. He was actually the one who phoned in with the call."

After a moment, "I still don't see why they have to phone a detective sergeant in the middle of the night."

"They were after his detective inspector."

"So they found her, although they don't know that. I still don't see why they were after either of us."

An unearthly yowling sounded in the distance as fox called to fox between the dustbins, and with a sigh, the answer was given.

"Apparently he sat there and watched her do it."

They spent the remaining hours of darkness at a very plush five-bedroom detached house in the suburbs, feelings of déjà vu fighting with feelings of boredom. They had seen the body naked in

the bath, the rose-pink water almost completely hiding her embarrassment, a pallid face showing a degree of relaxation that no living human could ever hope to assume. There was no evidence of a fight, nothing even to suggest an argument, a row, or even a small tiff. Their examination of the house had revealed no money problems, no evidence of extra-marital affairs, nothing that suggested anything other than an ordinary marriage.

"I still don't believe it."

"Believe it, Hannah. Believe it."

"Phil Reed is not a murderer."

Sam had learned to have great respect for Hannah Angelman's abilities in the seven months he had known her, but this time he thought that she was wrong.

"But when she was found, he was sitting in the bathroom just looking at her corpse, as if it were the most normal thing in the

He was sitting in the bathroom looking at her corpse, as if it were the most normal thing in the world . . .

world. The scalpel was on the side of the bath. He'd been drinking wine—had a couple of glasses. There was even a half empty glass of wine on the side

of the bath by the body, as if to make out that she'd joined in."

"But has he admitted to murder?"

"He hasn't said anything much. He wants to talk to you."

She leaned back in her chair, looking toward Sam as he stood in front of her desk, yet not seeing him.

"Are we sure the house was secure?"

"Completely."

"So there was no possibility of third-party involvement?"

"None whatsoever."

Another possibility excluded, she reflected that the options were running out for Dr. Philip Reed.

Outside the window of her office some seagulls, ranging far from their usual home around the Gloucester docks, called raucously as they hovered in the swirling spring air. As if called by them, she rose from her chair and went to stare out the window at the constant traffic of Lansdowne Road; the morning rush into Cheltenham was just beginning.

"It's an odd way to murder someone . . . maybe it is suicide."

"With him watching? Anyway, his fingerprints are all over the handle of the scalpel, which is clear evidence that he took an active part in things. I don't know what else you need. Accept it, Hannah. He killed her."

"Other than the cuts to her wrists, was there any evidence of trauma to the body?"

"The pathologist says the only thing he can find are two tiny puncture marks, one by each of the cuts."

"Nothing else? No ligature marks? No head injury?"

"No."

"That would suggest that she allowed him to do it."

"Unless she was drugged. Perhaps that's what the puncture marks mean; or perhaps he put something in her wine. We'll only know for sure when we get the toxicology back in a day or two."

Hannah turned back to him. "No, she was complicit. At worst this was assisted suicide."

Sam snorted. "Assisted and spectated, then. She was naked in the bath, Hannah. He must have sat there and watched her die."

"Poor sod."

He couldn't believe what he had heard. "Why do you say that? After what he's just done, I don't think he deserves any sympathy."

"There's a lot of history in that marriage, Sam."

"I think he drugged her while she was in the bath—hence her glass of wine—then slit both her wrists and sat and watched her while she bled to death. That's horrible, that's unforgivable. No amount of history comes anywhere near to excusing that."

"It might explain it, though."

"I don't see how."

She turned abruptly around. "Why don't we go and find out? Where is he?"

"Room three. Fisher's with him."

As they walked down the stairs to the interview rooms, Sam said, "He had everything. Large house, big car, beautiful wife, and now he's thrown it all down the drain. What drives a man to do that? Surely it can't just have been a row."

"Which is why I'm having a problem with this. Something tells me that there's more to this than is at present apparent."

It was when they had nearly reached the interview room that Sam asked, "What did you mean by 'history'?"

"They had a child, but it died after a few weeks. Internal abnormalities or something. It was a blessing, really."

"Oh."

"They never had any more luck. Phil and his wife had many good things in their lives, but I don't think they ever considered them adequate compensation. I look at Phil and I see a lovely man who's as crippled as effectively as if he were paraplegic."

It was the tone as much as the words that impressed Sam. He

asked with a slight smile that hid concern, "Have you got a thing for him, Hannah?"

She laughed. "There's no need for jealousy, Sam."

For Sam's liking, this was altogether too public a place for such sentiments. "Not so loud. I thought we were being discreet. You know what this place is like. There's always someone listening."

"Oh, of course." She lowered her voice to a stage whisper. "Mustn't have a D.I. sleeping with her sergeant. The world might end."

"It might . . . for us."

She stopped quite abruptly so that he had to turn slightly to face her. She asked, "Would that bother you?"

"Of course it would."

"I'm not just another conquest?"

He looked around, as if the painted stone walls might hide camouflaged eavesdroppers. "Of course not!"

She examined him for a brief moment, twitched a smile, then sighed, "Good."

He stepped toward her and said in a low tone, "I mean it, Hannah."

A nod, but one that was not as certain as it might have been. "Good."

She began walking again and he fell into step. "So why are you so convinced about Phil Reed's innocence?" he asked.

She had to think about that one. Eventually, all she could produce was: "I've just known him a long time. He's not a killer."

"Wasn't maybe. He is now."

"Is that steak okay? It certainly looks good."

Her mouth full, Kate nodded at once. "Mmm . . . delicious."

He thought, You're beautiful. Even a blind man would be able to tell that.

"And the wine? You like the wine?"

"I certainly do."

Reed smiled. "So I should hope, considering the price."

He hadn't really been able to afford the restaurant—if truth be told, he felt out of place in it—but he had things to say tonight.

"Well it's very good . . . mmm . . . very good indeed."

"I thought so."

The couple at the table next to them were in their late sixties and would not have looked out of place at an imperial ball; he suspected that they were looking secretly askance at the whipper-snappers so uncomfortably close to them, perhaps unable to believe that they had let people in who were not related to the Lord Lieutenant of the County.

"So what's the excuse for such extravagance?"

"Do I need an excuse?"

"Well . . . it's hardly in character."

He pretended outrage. "How dare you! I'll have you know, I've been known to spend three pounds on a bottle of wine."

"And the rest!" Her smile gilded a lily and somehow improved it.

"Anyone would think I'm a cheapskate."

She leaned forward conspiratorially. "Wouldn't they just?"

"Oh! So that's what you think, is it?" He turned his face away, corners of his mouth turned downward. If he hoped for sympathy, it was a hope that was doomed from the off.

"Me and a few thousand others . . ."

There was no background music in the restaurant, no violins. As he let the silence between them grow, the chattering around them intruded.

His timing was good, though.

"So you wouldn't want to marry me?" The tone—hurt innocence—was also good.

"What?"

Feigned surprise. "You wouldn't want to marry me. What with me being a cheapskate."

As she realized what he had said, her face erupted with bright delight. "Oh . . . Oh, God . . ."

"Fair enough," he went on, apparently oblivious of her reaction. "I'll strike you off the list and then move on . . ."

"You mean it?"

He shrugged. "It was only an idea. It doesn't matter."

She reached out, grasped his hand, as if to make him realize that she had something to say. "Of course I do! My God! Of course I do. I thought you'd never ask."

He continued in the same slightly distracted tone, "Only, now that I've got a consultant's job . . ."

"You what?" Her voice rose appreciably, and Lord and Lady Muck next door did not like it.

"Didn't I tell you? I've been appointed as consultant pathologist at Saint Benjamin's. I start in three months."

"That's fantastic!"

"Is that a 'yes' to marriage, then?"

"Of course it is!"

He shook his head. "You just want to marry a doctor. You're a gold digger."

At last he smiled, and after a moment's pause, she sighed huge relief.

"You bet," she said.

"Interview commencing at eight twenty A.M., Friday, the seventh of June 2006. Present are Dr. Philip Reed, Detective Sergeant Sam Rich, and Detective Inspector Hannah Angelman. Dr. Reed has been cautioned but has declined to take up his right to have a solicitor present."

Hannah smiled at the man across the desk. "Hello, Phil."

He bowed his head. His demeanor was one of exhaustion, but his smile was genuine. "Hannah."

"I'm only the pathologist, the one who has to come face to face with whatever atrocity someone has brought upon another."

"You know Sam?"

"I think we've met a couple of times."

She relaxed back in her chair as if she were in a coffee shop, as if this were a meeting between

old mates from university. "I must say, I never expected to find us in this position."

His head bobbed from side to side. "A life without surprise would be a poor life indeed. It might, though, be marginally better than one that contains too many of them."

"Or ones that are too big."

He acknowledged this graciously. "Indeed."

"How long have we known each other, Phil?"

"Oh, I suppose it must be seven, maybe eight years."

She nodded. "I thought I knew you."

"No human being ever truly knows another."

"But I think I can usually tell the killers. God knows I've known a few."

Reed closed his eyes. Sam thought that he looked ready to sleep for a thousand years. His jacket was creased and looked tired, his shirt collar grimed. He said slowly, didactically, "Killing and killers aren't a specific type, Hannah. Even I know that, and I'm only the meat man, the poor blood infantry, the pathologist. I'm only the one who has to come face to face with whatever atrocity someone has brought upon another."

"So what happened last night?"

He explained with brutal simplicity, "My wife died."

"That we know. It's what we don't know that I need you to tell me, and you're the only one who can."

Sam thought for several seconds that he was showing no emotion at all, but then he realized his mistake. Reed's eyes were

aqueous, sparkling despite the gloom of the surroundings. "No one on the outside knows what goes on between four walls."

"But you were on the inside."

He sighed, and with perfect timing a single tear tracked down his right cheek. "Yes."

"So tell me what happened."

Now he drew in breath, a ragged, almost juddering sound. "I thought it would all be straightforward. I thought that it would be an ending."

"And isn't it?"

"No."

Sam said in a low tone, "It was for your wife."

Reed seemed surprised that anyone else was in the room. "Yes," he agreed.

Hannah asked, "How do you feel about that, Phil?"

"How do you expect me to feel? My wife's dead."

"Who's fault is that?"

He even managed to smile. "On the face of it, mine."

"Is that a confession?"

At which he was given pause. "Ah, thereby is suspended a very interesting tale."

"Did you kill Kate?"

His reply might have been to a question about the answer to number twenty-one down. "I've been thinking long and hard about that. I suppose, taking everything into account, I would have to admit that I bear some responsibility for her death, yes . . . Yet, no. There was a degree of inevitability about the events that culminated in Kate's death."

"So you admit that you slit her wrists?"

He took this, considered it, then admitted, "Yes, she asked me to."

Sam was incredulous. "She asked you to? She asked you to grab hold of her hands and slice through her wrists?"

"Something like that."

"And then you sat there? You're asking us to believe that she was quite happy for you to watch her die?"

Reed protested. "We talked. We remembered the good times that we'd had together."

Sam had heard stories on *Jackanory* that were more believable. "You're asking us to believe that you just sat there while she sat in a bath of water, completely naked, and bled to death?"

"She *was* my wife. I had seen her *sans culottes* before."

"You know what I'm saying."

"Yes, Detective Sergeant, and I am asking you to believe what

I'm saying. I loved Kate. I wouldn't murder her."

"Yet you admit that you slit her wrists."

"That's right."

"What reason would she have for suicide? An attractive woman, a happy marriage . . . it *was* a happy marriage, wasn't it?"

Reed smiled. "Are any truly happy?"

"We're talking about yours."

Reed looked up at him, tears still bright in his eyes. "Well, since you ask, no it wasn't . . . But that wasn't because we didn't love each other. Far from it."

Sam thought that he was onto something. "Why was it unhappy? Was it money? Or was she having an affair? Were you, perhaps?"

"No, nothing like that."

"Then why did you kill her?"

"I . . ."

Sam wasn't interested in his protestations. "Come on, Doctor. There's no point in refusing to tell us. You're going to be convicted of murder whether you say anything or not. The only difference is whether you get parole sooner rather than later. The Parole Board don't like people who refuse to accept guilt."

Reed turned to Sam's boss. "I didn't murder Kate, Hannah. I loved her."

Hannah raised her eyebrows. "So you what? Put her out of her misery?"

Reed might have been about to protest, but instead he paused, then said, "That would be a fair description."

"But why? What misery did Kate have to be put out of?"

Reed had begun to weep again. For protracted seconds he said nothing, his head bowed low, then he said sadly, "Death."

"That went well, I think."

Reed, who was tired, raised a smile as he brought a tray of dirty crockery out to the kitchen. "It was superb. The desserts were brilliant."

"Thank you. I thought so."

"Mind you, it was obvious that Will and Ruth preferred my main." He decided this with perfect seriousness, apparently after considered study.

Kate was outraged. "You think? You really think?"

Careful not to smile. "I know."

She shook her head. "You sad man."

He had put down the tray and was helping his wife unload the dishwasher. "Where does this go?"

"Don't you know?"

"Obviously not."

"You should be ashamed of yourself. It just goes to show how little you do around here."

"Thank you for that. I'll tell you what, I'll give up the day job—and the money it brings in—and become a househusband. You can support us."

She straightened up. She was wearing a figure-hugging bright blue, almost iridescent evening dress. "I may only be a humble publisher," she pointed out, "but I think you'd notice it if I packed it in tomorrow."

"I seriously doubt it."

And, abruptly, her demeanor changed and became almost fearful. "You really think so?"

"What does that mean?"

A slight hesitation now came upon her. "It's still supposed to be a secret, but Ruth's just found out that she's pregnant. She told me this evening."

"Really?"

"She's thrilled."

For a moment, he was blind to her thinking. "I'm not surprised . . ." It was at this point that he came to realization. "Oh . . ."

"Wouldn't it be wonderful? To have a baby?" Something joyous had come into her face, something that frightened him.

"Well . . . I suppose so."

"Maybe twins," she rushed on. "At any rate, we could eventually have two, or maybe three."

He held up his hands. "Whoa. Hang on there. We've haven't decided on having one yet. We've only been married three years."

"But you want children, don't you? You've always said that you did."

He felt buffeted by her passion, wanted to swim to shore. "Yes . . ."

"Well, then."

He gestured with his hands that she should slow down. He was fully aware that if he just refused she would be upset, there might even be a row, and he didn't want that. At the same time, he wanted her to calm down, think rationally, where now he was sure that she was driven by instinct. "I just wasn't expecting things to change quite so quickly. We've got a good life together."

"And we'll have an even better one when we're parents. You'll see."

"This is all a bit sudden, Kate."

She couldn't see it. "After three years?"

"I hope we're going to be married a long time."

Despite his wish to avoid confrontation, she was plainly becoming angry at his intransigence. "But what's the point of marriage without children?"

"For Christ's sake, marriage is more than just a means of making babies, Kate."

"But it's also more than just two people enjoying themselves." Her voice was rising, a frown beginning to form on her face. "It's more than just dinner parties, holidays, and good sex." She stopped. Her next sentences were dug out of a very deep pit of emotion. "I want a child, Phil. I want a baby."

And before such depth of passion he found too late that he had nowhere to swim to, no safe haven to find. Before it, he was powerless. "Oh, God . . . Come here, Kate."

As they held each other, she said through tears against his shoulder, "I didn't realize before how much I wanted children, but I've been unable to get the idea of babies out of my head. And then when Ruth told me . . ."

Even then, he knew not only that she would have her way, but also that her way would be costly.

"About five months ago, Kate was diagnosed with glioblastome multiforme."

"And what's that?"

Reed smiled sadly. "It's a lovely name, isn't it? Sounds properly scientific, suitably imposing. Much more impressive than words like *cancer*, or *brain tumor*."

"Is that what it is? Cancer?"

He sighed. "Oh yes. It's a brain tumor, but it's a brain tumor and a half . . . a supercharged brain tumor. A really nasty, aggressive one. Down the microscope, it looks beautiful, but then all the really vicious diseases look like that. It's one of God's little jokes." He paused, then with intense sourness he added, "Full of jokes, is God. Full of them. A right comedian."

Hannah glanced at Sam, then asked Reed, "But she was being treated . . . ?"

"She was being *palliated*."

"What does that mean?"

"It's a euphemism. Have you noticed how we live in a euphemistic society? Everything has to be disguised, hidden, pushed away. Call it by another name and then all will be better. The trouble is, deep down they're still the same. The unpleasant is still unpleasant, the vicious is still vicious, the untreatable is still untreatable."

"She was going to die?"

"Oh yes. She was going to die, and how. Maybe in three months, maybe in six."

Sam thought that he understood. "So you killed her."

"So I did as she asked," Reed said with justifiable pedantry.

Sam, though, seemed less impressed by Reed's aspiration to mercy. "Why like that? Why naked in a bath? Why not tablets? You must have access to any number of tablets."

"I know about death, Sergeant. It's my job, God help me. You have to be careful with tablets. They can make you sick, they can make you fit, they can give you unendurable stomach pains. Whereas lying in a warm bath, your lifeblood slowly draining away . . . there is no pain or vomiting or convulsion. Just slow, lazy unconsciousness from which you never wake up."

"You say you slit her wrists and that she was quite happy for you to do it. I can't believe that. It must have hurt like hell. No one would willingly allow someone else—no matter how much they love them—to put a blade through their flesh."

Reed's demeanor suggested that he was in front of a particularly dense medical student. "You're right, of course . . . unless you use local anaesthetic first."

Hannah understood. "The puncture marks on her wrists."

Despite everything, Reed seemed impressed by this piece of professionalism. "They were noticed? Good. Who's your pathologist?"

"Colin Browne."

He nodded, then said gently, "Tell him to treat her with dignity."

"I'm sure he will."

Sam remained untainted by sentimentalism and intruded on the moment. "Forgive me for being dense, but you're asking us to believe that you sat there and watched her die? Isn't that a bit ghoulish?"

"What was I supposed to do? Go and make a cup of tea? Perhaps watch *Countdown* on the telly?"

"But just to sit there? To watch your own wife, who you claim to love, dying?"

Reed was distracted, the last hours of his wife still playing in his mind. "She didn't want to die alone. Who does?"

"Is that the only reason?"

"Yes. Why shouldn't it be?"

"Because I think you enjoyed sitting there while she died."

He shook his head. "It's a funny thing. I know all about death. I'm totally familiar with what it does in all its forms; so much so I can work back from the traces that it leaves on the corpse to deduce what form it took when it visited. That's my skill." He paused, then said, "Yet I know nothing about *dying*. That's as

alien to me as the surface of Jupiter."

Sam thought he understood. "So you treated your own wife's death as some sort of peep show?"

"No, Sergeant. I did not enjoy the experience one bit."

"I think you're sick, Dr. Reed. I think you drugged your wife, slit her wrists, and then sat there drinking wine and enjoying her death."

At which Reed gave up on his student. "I don't really care what you think, Sergeant Rich."

"It's bad enough that you were willing to cut your wife's flesh yourself, but then to watch her bleed to death . . ."

Reed's head was bowed, as if penitent. "I didn't want to do it, but when the time came, she couldn't do it herself." In a slightly louder voice he asked, "You don't think I enjoyed doing it, do you?"

"You were fascinated, weren't you? A little experiment: Slit the wrists and then sit back and watch. Did you make notes? Did you get off on it? Was it worth—"

"Shut up!" Reed suddenly looked up at Sam and rose slightly from his chair, so that they were face to face in a posture of animal aggression.

Hannah said mildly, "Well, perhaps we've got as far as we're going to get for now. Come on, Sam." They stood up, then to Reed she said, "We're going to have to charge you, I'm afraid."

"Of course."

"I'll need to discuss with the superintendent whether it's manslaughter or murder."

"Perhaps—"

She failed to notice that Reed had something more to say. "And of course, when we get the toxicology and the full autopsy reports back, they may change matters."

"No doubt, but—"

"Even if you were acting from the best of motives, I'm afraid that what you did was illegal. Manslaughter is the very best you can hope for."

Reed smiled. "You think so? I would have said that the best would be redemption."

"Redemption for what, Phil? You claim that what you did was some sort of act of kindness, don't you?"

"I suppose so."

"Well, then . . ." She shrugged. "I think you can switch the tape off now, Sam."

But at this, Reed said suddenly, "No!"

"No? Why not?"

He took a deep breath. "I want to tell you something more."

She looked at him, then sat back down slowly. "Really? We don't often get such voluble people in here."

"It's your lucky day, then."

"What do you want to tell us about, Phil?"

"The swirling patterns."

This non sequitur found her lost. "I'm sorry?"

Slowly he repeated the phrase. "The swirling patterns." His tone was dreamy, almost awe filled. "As I cut Kate's wrists, the blood dripped into the bath water and made swirling pink patterns that faded as they curled around and around . . ."

She looked again at Sam, saw that he was as intrigued as she. "What about them?"

But Reed, it seemed, was in a circumlocutory mood. "It wasn't a happy marriage—hadn't been for some time—but we still loved each other, and as we sat together while she died, we both realized just how much." His voice trailed away for a moment, before, "Of course, happy marriages are made, not born, and ours was made unhappy by only one thing."

"Which was?"

"Children. When they're born, they keep you awake at night, they scream and they puke and they dribble. They lie in their own excrement, and they live entirely for themselves. They suck you dry and then come back for more. They drive you beyond the limits that you thought you could endure, and with a heartlessness that not even the most evil dictator in the world would ever show, they come back for more of you." And with surprise they saw that there were tears in his eyes, and more than that, for he was crying almost uncontrollably. His last words were almost lost in this flood of sorrow, were uttered in a soft moan. "And we could not have them."

Over the sound of a late-night news program on the radio, Reed heard what might have been the sound of weeping coming from the en suite shower room. He sat forward in bed. "Kate? Are you all right?"

There was no response. "Kate? What's wrong?"

The door opened. Kate, dressed only in a long nightdress, came out. Her eyes were red, her manner combative. "What do you think is wrong? The usual, of course. Another bloody period."

"Oh." He relaxed back into the pillows. As she climbed in beside him he said gently, "Don't worry, Kate. It doesn't matter . . ."

Which was precisely the wrong thing to say. "Of course it matters! It matters to me anyway."

"And to me."

She was on the edge of tears again, but these were not just the tears of sadness and frustration, these were also of anger and suspicion. "Really?"

"Yes, of course."

She stared at him, examined him as if she had caught a pick-pocket. "You've never been keen on having a baby." This had been an unspoken accusation for some months now, the elephant in the corner that was, until now, ignored by both of them.

"Yes, I am." He protested his innocence as vehemently as he could, but the effect was spoiled when he went on, "It's just that I'm a bit scared. It's a big step. And there's a lot going on at work . . . I'm under a lot of stress at the moment."

Kate pounced. "Oh, that again." In a caricature of his voice she said, "*I'm tired, Kate. I've had a stressful day.*"

"That's not fair."

She grabbed hold of the duvet, clenched it as if she could squeeze from it life, life that could be poured into a child. "I want a baby, Phil. I *need* one."

He reached across to her, held her. "And we'll have one, Kate. We just need to be patient."

She remained stiff in his arms. "We've been patient for two years now."

"Well . . . sometimes it takes that long."

His words had no effect. "I'm running out of time, Phil."

"Nonsense. You're only thirty-five."

But she was implacable—or rather, the idea that had been growing inside of her was implacable.

"I want to see someone."

"What?" Despite asking the question, he knew exactly what she meant. He drew back from her.

"I want to see someone. See if there's a problem."

"Of course there isn't a problem."

"How do we know that?"

"I told you, it's just a question of time and patience."

"But it won't be long before we run out of time." She changed subtly from an accuser to a supplicant. "We have to make sure that everything's all right now."

"Oh, Kate."

"Please?"

Every instinct told him that this was a mistake, that he was heading for consequences that he would regret.

But he loved her. Loved her more and more as the anguish within her grew.

After a long while, he said, "Okay, okay. You win. We'll see someone . . . make sure everything's all right."

"So we went to a specialist. Professor Carter. Nice chap. Bumbling and hearty. Should have been an oncologist—no one would have minded the bad news hearing it from him. I certainly didn't."

Hannah asked, "What was the bad news?"

"Kate's ovaries were misfiring badly. She wasn't producing many eggs, and even if by some chance she managed to throw one down her fallopian tubes, it was extremely unlikely it would do any good. You see, I'm not up to scratch. I can stand to attention when required, but my little chaps, my storm troopers, are not of the best. A sick and weedy bunch, not at all the kind of recruits who held the British Empire together for so long. I am, to use Professor Carter's oh-so-charming expression, *subfertile*."

"So?"

"So we couldn't have children, not without help."

Sam asked tentatively, "But I thought—"

"That we had a child?" Reed's question was sour enough to scald.

"Yes."

"We live in a modern society, Sergeant. There are always ways and means, if you have enough money."

"IVF"

Reed nodded just once. "In vitro fertilization." He laughed, this time shaking his head. "Do you know what that entails, Hannah?"

"Tell me."

"Pots and pots of money, for a start. And pain—mustn't forget the pain. Injections, examinations, operations. Then there's the humiliation. Oh, there's a great big, excruciating, toe-curling dollop of that; it doesn't stop, either. You think you're over the worst, and then they find some other way to make you feel like a laboratory rat, like the useless excuse for a man that you really are."

"But you were successful," she pointed out.

Reed, though, wasn't listening. "And even that's not really the worst."

"What was the worst?" she asked, although she might just as well have not bothered.

"Five times we went through it. For two long years we counted out our lives with injections and blood samples and disappointments, soaring to the summit of expectation, then plunging into the deepest and darkest of despairs. *That* was the worst. The continual disappointments."

"Eventually it worked, though."

"Yes." He paused, then sighed. "Eventually we had a child."

Reed only remembered to ring at the last moment. He had his overcoat on as he waited for her to answer.

"Kate? Listen . . ."

But Kate had news of her own. "No, Phil. Listen to me. I've got—"

"Kate? I'm sorry. I haven't got much time. I'm afraid I won't be home until late tonight. They've found a body in Nettleton Woods. A teenage boy, and he's naked."

Reed's growing reputation as a forensic pathologist meant that occasions like this were becoming increasingly common. He was aware that it was impinging on Kate, hoped that she understood.

"But—"

"I'm on my way there now, and the police want the autopsy done tonight, so I'll be lucky if I'm home much before two tomorrow morning."

He was sure that she understood. The income was not inconsiderable, after all.

"Oh, but—"

"I know, I know. I'm sorry, but it can't be helped. I really am going to have to go now. Bye, love."

"But I've got some news, Phil—"

Reed, though, was already out of the office, the line already dead. Slowly, Kate pulled the phone away from her ear, then looked at it. In a low voice she said sadly, "Wonderful news . . . I'm pregnant."

"We rowed the next day. No, we *battled*. Nuclear warfare broke out. I was tired—knackered—and Kate, not surprisingly, was crushed. She had planned a big celebration, which I had ruined. Yet how was I to know that she had bought champagne, that for her she had achieved the ultimate, that her sole ambition had been realized? I tried to explain, and then I tried to apologize, but I couldn't get the tone in my voice right; no matter how hard I tried, it always sounded petulant, defensive, even to my ears. Eventually, of course, my reserves of compassion ran out, and I entered combat. I said that she was being pathetic, that it didn't matter which day we celebrated. And, in turn, she questioned my commitment to parenthood, said that I had never really wanted a child.

"We sank deeper and deeper into the fray, rummaging into the far corners of our arsenals for older and older weapons to use,

ancient slights and mistakes real and imagined resurrected." He paused for a moment, then as if he had been drinking in a well of memory, he went on, "It lasted all day, and I think that that was the point at which our marriage started to perish, a fruit that had lost its bloom, that had gone beyond the point of maximum sweetness, had slipped into sourness . . . And you know the worst of it?"

"Tell me."

"She was right. The news that she was pregnant made me realize that I *didn't* want a child. I had enough responsibility in my life, without the worry that a newborn would bring. It had always been Kate's desire, not mine, and I had deceived myself into thinking that it was a wish that we shared because I loved her, because I wanted to please her."

"That's only natural."

"Maybe, but it's not enough. I appreciated consciously then for the first time that a baby would only widen the crack that had been gradually appearing between us. I think it was at that moment that I realized how bleak our future was together."

Sam asked, "So you killed her?"

Reed was tired of Sam's hostility. "Is one of us being stupid? I told you—she had an incurable brain tumor. That's why I helped her to die."

With unmistakable sarcasm, Sam said, "Oh yes. I forgot."

Hannah asked, "Did you ever come to blows?"

"Never."

"But the marriage broke down."

He gave this deep consideration. "No, not really. It just *changed*. The reality hit me. If I wanted Kate, I would have to accept a baby as well. Without a baby, there would be no Kate."

"Did that upset you?" This from Sam.

"You keep trying to suggest that Kate and I lived in some sort of conflict, but we didn't. I had no hatred for Kate, never did have." He turned to Sam's superior. "I *loved* her, Hannah. Surely you understand that?"

Sam pointed out, "Most people who love someone don't help them to die."

"There is no greater love. I gave away that which I prized above all else."

"Which is a jolly useful excuse for a killer."

Reed made a disgusted noise at the back of his throat, refusing to respond. It was Hannah who asked, "What happened when you realized that things had changed?"

"For the next six months a kind of truce prevailed; no written

terms, but in the back of our minds, I think, was the fear that another such skirmish and we might go too far for redemption. For my part, at least I knew that I still loved Kate with just as much conviction as before, and after last night, I know that she still felt the same about me. It was just that we had different needs, wanted different things from our relationship.

"Then her water broke just before Christmas. She was only twenty-five weeks. Until then we had dared to hope that everything was going to be all right, that we would at least be spared a difficult pregnancy."

"But you weren't," guessed Hannah.

"Fat chance." He took a long breath. "She had to be induced, for fear of infection. What came out was a girl, not obviously deformed . . ."

"But?"

"Alice was a weak and pathetic thing, which made it worse. The intensity of Kate's love for her was difficult to witness . . ."

"Why difficult?" Sam's question interrupted his intense reverie.

"Have you ever been in love, Sergeant?"

"Well . . ."

"Of course you have, and you should appreciate this terrible thing called jealousy. Jealousy, not envy, although perhaps there was some of that as well."

"What's the difference?"

"Envy is the desire to possess. Jealousy is the fear of losing something precious. When I looked at Kate, at how she became completely encased by her relationship with Alice, I saw no room for me, saw that I had lost her. In turn, I envied the love that Alice received, wanted a share, thought that I was entitled to one."

"Yet you've stayed with Kate, even after Alice died."

"Oh yes. You see, jealousy is born of love; the stronger the love, the greater the jealousy. When Alice died, only the jealousy was gone." He paused to reconsider. "But not, I see now, the guilt."

"Guilt?"

But Reed did not hear. "It soon turned out that Alice had terrible internal abnormalities. Her lungs failed to develop as they should, and she was functionally blind, probably also deaf although they could never be sure. She had cardiac abnormalities too. She could breathe, but only on near-pure oxygen. She had one kidney, and most probably malformation of her genital tract . . . In the six weeks that she lived, she had *five* bouts of pneumonia."

"Is that what killed her?"

Once more, Reed failed to hear, or at least react. "I knew the neonatologist in charge of her care—have done since medical

school. I could see that when he took me to one side, sat me down in his office, he was having a hard time. His voice trembled slightly as he told me that he doubted Alice would live much more than another four weeks, that even if God granted us a miracle, Alice's quality of life would be intolerable . . ." Reed seemed to become lost in the past. Certainly he seemed to be disoriented because his next remark was disjointed. "It was the swirling patterns, I remember best . . ."

Sam breathed. "Swirling patterns again."

Hannah silenced him angrily, but it didn't matter because Reed wasn't listening. "I know the reason for them. It's because you're mixing two liquids of different densities and one flows through the other for a short while before they become totally and perfectly mixed. But it's the beauty of the patterns that I can't get over. Benoit Mandelbrot described it mathematically, talked about partial dimensions, fractals, making it sound like science fiction, as if there were creatures from another place doing something to make them."

"What about the swirls, Phil?"

But Reed was a long way back in his past.

The music of critical care, symphonic variations on life and death, on dying and surviving, on fading into and coming out of a coma. He'd never felt comfortable in an intensive therapy unit, even one decked out with tinsel and with a Christmas tree in the corner. As a pathologist he was of the opinion that what the medical staff did was too far removed from normal medical and nursing practice. Here, it wasn't patients that were treated, but measurements; they worried about the central venous pressure, the blood gas levels, blood biochemistry. The patients were often deliberately sedated, the victims of multiple puncture wounds where tubes entered wounds in the neck and the feet and even in the groins. The patients became not human, but manufactured entities, biomedical organisms, human fused with machine. In a neonatal intensive care unit, however, the victims fought back. Despite being almost overwhelmed by the enormity of the medical intervention to which they were subjected, their humanity was, if anything, magnified. They evoked even greater compassion because they were so small, so apparently incapable of overcoming this adversity.

Alice was intubated again because of the pneumonia, her breathing dictated by a machine. She was still so small, still so sickly, so *raw*. The nurse and doctors were at a hand-over session, their attention as usual on readouts and test results.

Reed stopped in front of the incubator, a small bag of saline dripped slowly into a tube extending from his dying daughter's right ankle. It was nearly nine o'clock at night, and as far as Kate was concerned, Reed was working late, another bloody postmortem.

He looked around. No one was paying attention to him—they were used to one of them (usually Kate) hanging around, getting in the way, unwanted but unassailable, given their part in the drama—and it was all over in ten seconds.

"What was over?" Hannah could sense something terrible and needed to break through Reed's cage of recollection.

"I was planning to turn, walk out at once . . . certainly not hang around . . ."

"What was over?"

"They caught my eye. They were so beautiful, I had to stop and watch them . . ."

"What was over, Phil?"

"It's obvious when you know. Two liquids of different densities . . ."

"What did you do?" She remained patient, though God knew that it was difficult.

"So beautiful, yet so deadly." His voice had taken on a singsong quality.

"Was it the bag of saline? Did you do something to that bag of saline?"

He came to, saw her again. "She was going to die, Hannah, and her death would not have been good. She had nothing to look forward to, no memories to comfort her. She was in limbo . . ."

"What did you put in the bag?"

But Mandelbrot's patterns had caught him again. "The patterns were translucent, like liquid crystals, precious jewels that were slowly dissolving as they moved, dissipating, becoming another small part of the whole."

"I know why, Phil. I need to know *how*."

"And having done it, I walked away. I went to the desk, told them how grateful I was, told them to ring if anything happened, then walked out, past Alice's incubator, past the bag of saline, now looking as clean and pure as it had before . . . I hated myself for that, for the hypocrisy and the lies that I had to tell those doctors and nurses, for pretending not to know what I knew." He paused for breath, then, "The phone call came an hour later, and all hell broke out . . ."

Hannah would have kept asking the question until doomsday. "What was it? What did you put in the bag of saline?"

He looked at her, challenged her almost. "Potassium chloride.

Just a 20 ml ampoule, but quite enough . . .” He frowned. “We need potassium, but not too much. A dangerous thing to play with. Too much and the heart stops. No PM will find it, not given those clinical circumstances, and there was no puncture mark, at least none that the medical staff hadn’t made.”

She asked her next question with studied calm. “You know what you’re saying, Phil? You’re admitting to the murder of your baby.”

“I admit that I gave peace to Alice, Hannah, but I didn’t murder her. To murder, you have to take life and Alice never had any. No power on Earth was ever going to give her that.”

Sam said sarcastically, “Another doctor playing God.”

“Another father having to do something terrible for the greater good.”

“Who’s good? Yours?”

“No,” contradicted Reed. “Kate’s.”

“You’re kidding! You did it for yourself. You’ve admitted to being jealous of your own child.”

“You don’t understand, Sergeant, and perhaps you never will. Just pray tonight that you’re never in a similar position.”

“I know that I won’t commit murder, and I know that I won’t destroy my wife’s life.”

“Do you think that I enjoyed what I did? That I took some sort of pleasure in seeing Kate’s distress? Yet all the while I knew also that what I had done hadn’t *caused* it; what I had done had only brought it forward, and at the same time I had ended Alice’s awful life.”

“You needn’t have told us, you know.”

“All these years I have wanted to confess to Kate, but never dared. What would have been the point? As she lay there and died, I nearly said something maybe half a dozen times, but held back. I wanted her last hours on Earth to be as happy as possible.” He suddenly straightened up in his chair, assumed some dignity. “And I think that I would have continued the silence had I not seen the blood drop into the water, had I not seen it swirl down into nothingness. Dr. Mandelbrot has a lot to answer for, you know.”

Hannah sounded almost depressed as she said, “We’ll almost certainly have to charge you with murder.”

“You think I care about that? You think I care about anything anymore?”

She shook her head. Sam just stared at Reed, who in turn had his head bowed. She said in a formal tone, “Interview terminated at ten thirty-six.”

Then she stood up, Sam following her lead. “I’ll pray for you, Phil, but they’ll roast you alive. They’ll chew you up, spit you out, and then smear you into the pavement.”

And all Reed said was, "Do me a favor, Hannah."

"What's that?"

"Don't pray for me. Pray that there's no afterlife, that after death, there's nothing."

"Why?"

"Because if there is something that follows life, if by the slightest of chances there is a heaven or hell or something like that, then Kate's there now. She's there even as we speak, and she knows." He suddenly shivered, as if a cold wind had blown past him, as perhaps it had. "She knows, Hannah. She *knows* what I did. I can't cope with that thought."

"Don't count on me in that quarter, Phil. I'm sorry."

She walked to the door, then turned. "We'll be back shortly."

As they walked back to Hannah's office, Sam said quietly, "He deserves everything he's going to get."

"Probably."

He was surprised by the doubt in her voice. "Probably?"

They were on the stairs before she spoke again. "Do you love me as much as that?"

"What do you mean?"

"Do you love me enough to do what he did?"

He couldn't see what she was talking about. "He murdered two people. You want me to copy him?"

She halted, turned to him. "Sam, he threw away his soul—and not just his soul, his whole earthly being, as well—for the woman he loved. Would you do that for me?"

"Don't be stupid, Hannah. He just did what he did for himself."

"You think so?"

"How else can you explain it? You surely don't believe that crap he fed us about loving her."

"Hatred's not the only reason for killing . . . in fact, it's quite a rare one. Love's a far commoner motive."

"I'd never kill for love."

She looked at him long and hard, then continued walking up the stairs. There was a small smile on her face.

"No," she said. "I can see that you wouldn't." 🐦

DYING WORDS

ACROSTIC BY ARLENE FISHER



For instructions on how to solve the acrostic puzzle, turn to page 55.
The solution to the puzzle will appear in the January/February issue.

DEFINITIONS

WORDS

A. Stoicism, e.g.	102	85	1	65	73	155	30	181	144	10
B. "The Philadelphia Story" actress: 2 wds.	114	12	209	54	161	123	78	157	69	186
C. Pune residents	156	49	31	167	130	200	149			
D. Equifax forte	13	183	86	47	111	25				
E. Aficionado, maybe	82	6	56	88	207	45	125	172	53	164
F. 1972 Bob Fosse movie	91	120	187	169	133	79	158			
G. Considerable	159	204	127	178	33	26	2	142		
H. "The Courtship of Miles Standish" figure	190	72	132	101	116					
I. Enough	146	21	71	60	162	87	201	7	121	93
J. Wrong	148	62	189	134	105	152	35	143	48	
K. 1969 MVP	135	16	203	122	110	76				
L. Whirl	4	188	103	196	39	58				
M. Supple	170	96	175	100	44					
N. Old library aid: 2 wds.	52	15	107	160	180	168	18	27	124	
O. On the radar, so to speak	151	104	74	198	28	11	43	99	206	66
P. Most capitals	24	46	84	8	182	36				
Q. Executive area: 2 wds.	118	68	137	97	165	113	9	61	128	32

1	A	2	G	3	S	4	L	5	Z	6	E	7	I		8	P	9	Q		10	A	11	O	12	B				
13	D	14	W	15	N			16	K			17	Y	18	N	19	R	20	W	21	I	22	U		23	X	24	P	
25	D	26	G	27	N			28	O	29	V	30	A			31	C	32	Q	33	G	34	T	35	J	36	P	37	V
38	Y			39	L	40	T	41	R			42	X	43	O	44	M	45	E	46	P	47	D	48	J	49	C	50	U
		51	Z	52	N	53	E			54	B	55	T	56	E	57	Y	58	L	59	S			60	I	61	Q	62	J
63	X	64	R	65	A	66	O			67	T	68	Q	69	B	70	Z	71	I	72	H	73	A	74	O	75	Y		
76	K	77	V			78	B	79	F	80	U	81	S	82	E	83	Z			84	P	85	A	86	D			87	I
88	E	89	S	90	W	91	F	92	Z			93	I	94	X			95	U	96	M	97	Q	98	S			99	O
100	M	101	H			102	A	103	L	104	O	105	J	106	U	107	N	108	Y	109	Z	110	K			111	D	112	S
		113	Q	114	B	115	R	116	H	117	V			118	Q	119	Y			120	F	121	I			122	K	123	B
124	N	125	E	126	S	127	G	128	Q	129	Y			130	C	131	V	132	H			133	F	134	J	135	K	136	R
		137	Q	138	V	139	W			140	Y	141	X	142	G			143	J	144	A	145	X	146	I	147	W		
148	J	149	C			150	Z	151	O			152	J	153	U	154	V	155	A			156	C	157	B			158	F
159	G	160	N			161	B	162	I	163	X	164	E	165	Q	166	V	167	C	168	N	169	F	170	M			171	U
172	E	173	Y	174	Z			175	M	176	T	177	W	178	G			179	S	180	N	181	A	182	P	183	D	184	Z
185	X	186	B			187	F	188	L			189	J	190	H	191	T	192	U	193	X			194	T	195	S	196	L
197	Z	198	O	199	Y	200	C			201	I	202	U			203	K	204	G	205	S	206	O	207	E	208	R	209	B

R. Semitropical fruit

64 41 19 115 208 136

S. Dunedin's locale:
2 wds

205 126 195 81 179 3 98 89 112 59

T. Lather-producing
preparation

194 40 55 191 34 67 176

U. Playfully coy

95 106 50 171 192 202 80 22 153

V. Basic

154 131 29 37 166 77 138 117

W. Did a banker's job

177 20 14 90 147 139

X. Eastern canine:
2 wds.

185 141 63 193 23 145 42 163 94

Y. Duck soup

129 17 119 199 57 140 173 108 75 38

Z. Glitzy attachment

70 51 5 109 92 83 184 150 197 174

THE GREEN FLASH

DEBORAH STANTON FORBES

Some people are just island people. I believe that. My husband and I are good examples.

Take me, for instance. I was born inland. Way inland. Kansas. I've heard that a preponderance of volunteers for naval sea duty come from the hinterlands. The theory is that they are a variety of human lemmings bound for the ocean. I'll buy that.

My husband, on the other hand, was born on the East Coast. Massachusetts. The fact that Bill lived at least fifty miles from the nearest beach surely contributed. He was a Navy veteran with service in the Atlantic and the Pacific. I do believe that's the reason we were so strongly attracted to islands, islets, holms, aits, bars, keys, cays, reefs, atolls, archipelagoes, seagirt strips of land, anything you can set foot on surrounded by water. It's not too surprising that we eventually owned and lived in a house with the ocean in our front yard. The culmination of a lifelong dream. "I want to live in a big house by the sea."

The island we chose (or maybe it chose us) was St. Maarten in the Caribbean. Pronounced Saint Martin by the English-speaking residents, Sint Maarten by the Dutch, and Saint Martan—accent on the *tan*—by the French French, from France. But generally, in conversation, Saint Martin plain and simple. Like Caribbean. You can say CaRIBbean or CarribBEan. Your choice.

The house we bought was in a fishing village on the French side called Grand Case (pronounced Grand Cass); it had three apartments (the big one up top and two small ones below). In season we rented these out to tourists. Two houses down was another house we rented to open a shop with living quarters upstairs; we lived above our shop when our apartments were occupied by renters or friends. We knew nothing about operating a shop, but we'd retired from advertising at age forty-nine, and like your average forty-nine-going-on-eighteen year olds, we believed we knew everything.

Besides, our island-born housekeeper Martha said a shop was needed, and we believed that whatever we didn't know about our island, Martha did. So we opened a shop and called it Pierre Lapin

after a three-foot-tall ceramic rabbit we'd acquired and shipped to the island.

Our house and shop faced on the main street and backed on the sea. Or faced on the sea and backed on the main (and only) street, however you looked at it. We were the only Americans in may-I-borrow-a-cup-of-sugar? distance, but there was a grocery store just down the street on the seaside next to the Chinese restaurant and the pier, and across the street from that was a school and a gendarmerie. Next to these lived Daisy, the local bread lady. Every morning we awakened to the smell of fresh French bread baking in a beehive-shaped outdoor oven.

By the time we got things organized (or thought we had) we'd spent much of our seed money. In addition to new mattresses and box springs (plus shipping), new linens for same, and for the digging of a new septic tank by Alexandre, the local plumber, the shop supplies got a somewhat short shrift. I'd bought a dozen umbrellas at a special sale at a gas station in Connecticut believing (wrongly, as it turned out) that tourists might find a need for same as well as locals. We picked up anything else cheap and attractive on our way down from New England. (We were trucking our belongings in a U-Haul. You sit up high in a biggish truck and look down on everybody except other truckers; these you acknowledge with a horn blast until you realize how annoying that is.)

Our artistic friend Jacquie came down with her daughter, who painted walls and shelves and such. They stayed awhile to help, bless them. Jacquie made charming articulated Christmas ornaments—a definite plus.

I found a source for hand silk-screened sea-island cotton from an American named Jim Tillett who lived on Saint Thomas, and I bought as much as I could afford. It was beautiful stuff—great designs, and drip-dry to boot. Somewhat pricey but worth it. At Tillett's they made shirts and skirts and pants and shorts, jackets and frocks from it. Even more pricey but definitely worth it. They had a used sewing machine they were willing to part with, so, "Martha," I said, "I need a seamstress."

She sent me Constance.

A plump, jolly-looking island lady with an impish smile, Constance lived down at the other end of town. She was Alexandre's mother.

"I've brought a few patterns," I told her.

She shook her head. "I don't need patterns. Just show me what you want me to make and I'll make it." So I handed her one of Bill's sport shirts and one of my wraparound skirts, and she cloned them. Amazing!

We'd landed in Paradise! Except for the fact that we were close to broke and tourists weren't flocking in . . . in the retail business they call it a cash flow problem. So we took on local orders—Contance made drapes for Frank down at the end of town. Bill and I covered a sofa in Naugahyde for Mary, the flying lady (she had her own plane), over on the Dutch side. We learned you can do just about anything if you must.

Robert (RowBEAR from Monaco originally, pardon me for telling you how to pronounce names, but the French don't say things like we do and it makes a difference), showed us how to silk-screen T-shirts, and our friend Rein Heere, a shop owner from the Dutch side, supplied us with plain tees to work on. And bit by bit we began to improve said cash flow. By the time our old pals from home came to check things out, we were breathing a little easier. Especially after a pair of French restaurants sprang up, one next to Pierre Lapin and one across the street.

"We like it, we want to buy a house," said friend John. Well, Martha's sister was a housekeeper for a wealthy aging Canadian couple at the end of town. John and his wife Cleo bought that house—you see how things were going? Smooth as silk.

Bill said, "Almost *too* good to be true."

I said, "It's our good luck. Plus hard work." And I quick-kissed my husband, "For more good luck! How does that song go, 'Everything's coming up roses'?"

"Seems to be so," John said. "Unless, of course, your neighbors are being so sweet, so accommodating because they're after your money."

I laughed. "How could that be? Unless Pierre Lapin begins to pay off, we're flat broke."

"But they don't know that," countered our canny lawyer friend. "They think you're loaded."

"Oh, poo!" was my response. "They're smarter than that. Besides, I take a certain amount of pride in the fact that they like us."

"They seem to," said Bill. Being from New England, he tended to be more cautious in his judgments than I.

"Well, I like them," I said, "and everything's going to be all right."

We got through the first year, and the second improved to the point where we needed a new sewing machine and a second seamstress, Lucillia. Bill began to make daily bank runs—each morning he deposited francs in the French bank in Marigot and dollars and sometimes a few guilders to the Dutch bank in

Philipsburg. Mastercard and Visa charges, as well as American Express . . . We had developed a cash flow! Life was sweet.

Except in May. In June. In July. The weather was good up north in the States, so traffic was slow. And we experienced our first hurricane. Well, not exactly a hurricane, but a wannabe hurricane—it skittered off to the British Virgins and then toward Bermuda. A nondisaster, but discouraging to visitors. Not even the Americans who owned houses on the island hung around. We missed them because they provided gracious hospitality. Jeannette Rockefeller, for instance, the wife of the governor of Arkansas. She served platters of the biggest shrimp I'd ever seen. But she left her estate under the care of caretakers, and so did the Akers and the Bells and the Wallaces (the sterling silver people). Even Rein Heere and Lydia DeJager, who owned by now a dozen Shipwreck Shops, took off for Holland.

We stayed put. We hadn't been off the island for nearly two years. Bill said we were getting island fever. But it was the old cash flow problem again. We'd spent new money on Tillett cotton and another sewing machine. Plus we'd raised Martha's salary—she deserved it—and we were taking care of two houses. We moved back to our own house, to our upstairs apartment looking out on the sea. I couldn't resist that turquoise ocean.

But Robert and his friends were still around, and Robert played host to a pig roast on the beach. A wonderful crowd, people from all over the world, Switzerland and France and Andorra and New York City (with Brooklyn accents) and the island, of course . . . He rented a Charlie Chaplin movie and although many of us spoke different languages we all laughed-to-criy.

Bastille Day we traveled to Marigot by boat for the French holiday. Emile's boat held sixteen people, I counted them. A funny thing, it didn't much matter that we were virtually penniless . . . tomorrow would be a better day, I said and I truly believed it. Richard (RishARD, Canadian French), whose charming restaurant could be found down an alleyway in Marigot, provided drinks and duck l'orange, and a good time was had by all. Richard asked me if I'd seen the green flash, and I said no, what's the green flash? and he said, "It's when the sun hides on the other side of the world. It teeters on the edge before it slips, and for one moment, just an instance, there's a green flash. It doesn't happen every time. Just sometimes."

"At sunset!" I tugged at Bill. "I want to see that. Let's pay attention today." But we forgot, so I put it on my list of important things to do.

I took the quiet time to learn more about my neighbors.

Martha's sister Lisa had a neighborhood party celebrating her daughter's engagement. We went with a gift. Emile took us on his boat over to Anguilla, an island four miles off from Grand Case. A rather strange American pair lived over there in partially built tourist accommodations; I took it that the Coughlins had a worse cash flow situation than we ever did.

Down the street toward Marigot lived the Christopher family, consisting of a tall, gangly husband, a plump, sullen-faced wife, and numerous children of stair-step sizes. The husband was a scowler, loud and argumentative. He'd go pushing a wheelbarrow down the street while shouting.

In the other direction across from Daisy lived the Hugos. He owned the company supplying gas for the cook stoves in the village, and she ran a department store of some sort in Marigot. More like a five-and-dime and odds-and-ends. She drove a Volkswagen badly; he drove an oil truck. Way down at the far end (Philipsburg-way) was John Lawrence. He used to own our house, now he ran a new motel he'd built.

September saw an increase in tourist traffic. Bank bags began to get fuller, we breathed a little easier. I was in the kitchen doing some breakfast eggs over easy for Bill when I heard his voice. I turned to see him come into the kitchen with our blue zip-lock bank bag in his hand and a peculiar expression on his freshly shaven face.

"Wha—" I blurted.

"On the stairs. Going out." He wiggled his finger at the bottom of the bag.

"It's been cut."

"But it was . . ." We headed for the bedroom. Still sitting between the twin beds was a sturdy brown bag with handles, a rabbit hand-sketched (by me) on the front. The bag was empty.

"We've been robbed," was Bill's observation.

"While we were sleeping."

"The bastard must have come into our bedroom."

"In the night. And we slept right through it."

The charge slips were found strewn over the sand, and a rather nice humidor we'd converted to cashbox use was found empty. Anything spendable had vanished.

The gendarmes came, peered here, peered there, asked questions in French and English. I kept saying, "They came into our room. While we were sleeping." I couldn't get over that fact.

Bill picked up new bank bags and we soldiered on. But we didn't sleep soundly. At least I didn't. I turned the outside lights on at

sunset and I looked for some sort of weapon. I chose steak knives—we owned nice sharp ones. I stuck the blades under the mattress, handles sticking out, and I practiced pulling the knives quick. I'd be ready for him next time, for sure, I told anyone who'd listen.

Bill expressed his doubts, I had to agree. "I wish we had a gun," I said. "He had the nerve to come into our bedroom while we were sleeping!"

"Shooting a pistol isn't a skill we've acquired," said Bill.

"But you used to shoot a BB gun when you were a boy."

"That's not the same thing," my husband said.

I sighed. "It doesn't matter anyway. We haven't got a gun. When we go to the States, we'll get one."

Now it was Bill's turn to sigh.

The thief didn't show up the next night. Nor the next. Nor next. I began to sleep better. Maybe he wasn't coming back. When he saw what we'd prepared he'd decided against it, though those steak knives looked mighty silly sticking out of our beds.

When Martha changed the linens she put them back the same way, replacing them gingerly.

"I know, Martha," I said, "but he came into our bedroom while we were sleeping. He could have cut our throats. If he'd wanted to."

She gave me a look. "Now he could," she said and went into the kitchen.

I don't know what woke me. I must have heard a sound, a small noise, a muffled tone . . . My eyelids flew up in the middle of the night like they were on cords and I took this picture. Somebody was standing in the doorway to our room. A man, not very tall, was standing in the doorway on his way in. He looked at me looking at him, and I made an outcry and struggled up. Bill heard my cry and hollered, rose up.

The figure in the doorway ran, and I ran after him in my nightgown. I trailed him to the railing on our seaside gallery, where he jumped over the rail and ran across the yard to the sea gate. He fled down the sea steps and vanished into the night.

When Bill reached me I was sobbing. "Damn," I said, "if we hadn't turned the lights on he wouldn't have known where to jump. He would have jumped onto the concrete and broken his leg. Damn!"

I told the gendarmes, "He was a boy. In his early teens maybe. To my knowledge I've never seen him before. But at least he didn't get what he came for."

Gendarme eyebrows rose when I showed them the steak knives. "I know," I said, "*Fou*."

Saturday night we went to Saba to visit our friend Jean who had a little shop on that mountain island. To get to Saba (the island we called Bali Hai) we had to fly; there was no beach for boat landing. The pilot, an old pro called the Pipe because of the corn cob he smoked à la Douglas MacArthur, ducked in, sank down, slid on an aircraft carrier-sized landing strip, and there we were—on Saba for the weekend. At least we were off the island. A change of scenery.

We flew home Sunday night, drove to Grand Case where all was quiet. The shop, our house, all was as it should be.

"This nightmare must be over," I told Bill.

"Maybe," he said.

"I missed it again," I said, looking out to my sea (it was my sea, I'd adopted it).

"Missed what?"

"The green flash. Tomorrow. I'll make a note—tomorrow."

We crawled into bed. I sat back up.

"Bill! Do you hear something?"

"Uhhh?"

"Down the street? Down by the Chinese restaurant?" I could see out across to Anguilla, but I couldn't see vertically down the street. I had to go out on the front gallery for that, and there, when I leaned over, I could see both ways. People were gathering down by the pier.

"Something's going on," Bill said. "I'd better go see."

"I'll go with you." We threw on some clothes and went.

We met up with a clump of people. Mr. Christopher and Frank from the Chinese restaurant and his young waitress. Emile and Yves from the new restaurant on our flank. Daisy and Jimmy Lawrence and his bookkeeper daughter—so many people that I began to lose track. There were gendarmes on the street and out on the sand, in a boat . . . Everyone was looking at a fishing boat—an ordinary fishing boat, it bobbed in the surf—there was something in the bobbing boat, there were bodies in the bobbing boat, lying in the bottom, bleeding and lying still . . .

"It's him!" In case I wasn't heard, I shouted again. "It's him!" The scene in my doorway, his face was burned on my mind like a negative on Kodak paper. The man, the boy, the child, whatever he was, he was dead. And the older man with him. They looked like brothers, relatives. Mr. Christopher was howling, literally howling.

Eugene, this gendarme was named Eugene, pronounce it as you

will, had limited English, but he managed to communicate clearly. "Cocaine," he said quite clearly. "They needed dollars for cocaine. Insufficient, *les* dollars." He mimicked a gun being aimed at his own head, "Bang, bang."

I said to Bill, "Because I caught him. I got him killed."

"Do you know them?" Bill asked the gendarme. "The drug dealers?"

Eugene just shrugged that Gallic shrug.

Robert, who'd showed up from someplace, told me, "Maybe they'll catch them. Maybe they won't. That's the way it is with the cocaine."

Bill narrowed his eyes at him. "Do you know the drug dealers, Robert?"

"Who, me? No, *mais non*. I may have my faults, Bill, but I'm not stupid, not Robert."

"Let's go home," my husband took my arm to lead me away. "Don't blame yourself."

"I may have my faults, Bill, but I'm not stupid. Tomorrow night—" I slid my arm around his waist. "—I'm going to see the green flash if it kills me."

Robert heard me. "They say when you see the green flash it means the end."

"The end? The end of what?"

"Whatever." Robert nodded knowingly.

"It's over, huh? Okay. It's over. Good night, Robert. Incidentally, you haven't paid your share of the money we paid for the blank T-shirts even though you got your shirts. To sell. You owe us one twenty-nine ninety. Maybe tomorrow?" One of the tales Lucillia told was that Robert was a French con man, which, of course, wasn't true. Robert was Monacan. ♪

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From "Drifts," AHMM, Jan./Feb. 2006

—Eve Fisher

You live up here, and it doesn't take long to understand why crime rates drop like a stone come November. Winter takes the place of crime.

REEL CRIME

STEVE HOCKENSMITH

Long before it was finished, Dennis Lehane had a good feeling about the new adaptation of his novel *Gone, Baby, Gone* . . . because of the movie's feel-*bad* ending.

A couple years back, Lehane read the first draft of the script (by actor Ben Affleck and writing partner Aaron Stockard) and was pleased to see it didn't sugarcoat his original downer denouement.

"I remember thinking, 'Wow. No matter how this turns out, hats off,'" Lehane says. "They kept the point, and that was a really ballsy thing to do. That probably cost them thirty million viewers."



Dennis Lehane. Photo by Terri Unger.

Avoiding a clichéd Hollywood ending was especially important to Lehane because it's something he barely managed to do himself. The novel (the fourth in the popular Kenzie/Gennaro private eye series) sets Lehane's heroes on the trail of a missing girl. The case leads to a show-down with a truly horrifying crew of child molesters—and the realization that some problems are too big for a couple gumshoes, or perhaps *anyone*, to solve.

"I told myself, 'I've gotta make sure this has a bright ending,'" recalls Lehane (who had a job working with abused kids before he hit it big as a writer). "And I just blocked. I couldn't write. Because it was (baloney). And then directly across the river from where I lived, a little boy was kidnapped. I knew in my heart that he was dead. And they found his body three days later. When I heard that, I dropped the hammer on the book. I said, 'There is no happy ending. That's a lie.' I finished the book in a mad dash of pure anger."

The result: what Lehane calls "the most depressing book I ever wrote." Which is really saying something, as his novels (including the acclaimed mystery/tragedy *Mystic River*) are hardly laugh-a-minute fluff. So it's a bit surprising that *Gone, Baby, Gone* would be the first of the Kenzie/Gennaro books to make it to the screen. Why start there?

"He just really loved the book" is the only explanation Lehane can offer. "He" being Affleck, who not only coscripted the adaptation but made it his directorial debut as well. Like Lehane, Affleck grew up in the Boston area, and the novel's Beantown flavor no doubt appealed to the fledgling filmmaker.

"It's the most authentically Boston film since (1973 cult fave) *The Friends of Eddie Coyle*," says Lehane. "It feels on every level like this is made by somebody who understands the ethos of the Boston character."

But Affleck didn't just make a great Boston movie. According to Lehane, it's a great movie *period*. The film, which opens October 19, stars Casey (brother of Ben) Affleck and Michelle Monaghan as P.I.'s Patrick Kenzie and Angela Gennaro. Hollywood heavyweights Morgan Freeman and Ed Harris add heft to the supporting cast, while rapper Slaine appears as sociopathic sidekick Bubba Rogowski.

Perhaps because he's an actor himself, Affleck cast his film with care, even turning to Lehane for advice at one point . . . advice Lehane couldn't give.

"I went out with Ben about a year ago, and he was just pumped," Lehane says.

"He started showing me Polaroids of actors saying, 'This is who we got to be such-and-such (character) and this is who'll be so-and-so and I wanted to ask you a question . . .' And I said, 'Ben, I have no idea who you're talking about. I wrote this book eight years ago. I've moved on.'"

That distance Lehane felt did have an upside, though: It left him free to enjoy the adaptation on its own terms—an experience he *didn't* have with *Mystic River*.

"Within sixteen months of the publication of that book, Clint Eastwood had wrapped shooting of the film," Lehane points out. "The first time I saw it, I had no idea what I'd just seen. None. I had to take it on faith when people said, 'That's a really good film.' It wasn't that I thought it was bad. I couldn't grasp it."

Fortunately, the rest of the world felt no such ambivalence, and the film was nominated for six Academy Awards.

After the success of *Mystic River*, Lehane was a literary star with loads of critical buzz and newfound mainstream name recognition. His next book, the psychological thriller *Shutter Island*,



Casey Affleck © Miramax Film Corp.

was a huge bestseller, and Lebane followed that up with a succession of creative departures: penning a play, releasing a collection of short

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stories, writing scripts for HBO's gritty crime drama *The Wire*, toiling on a massive historical novel. Somewhere in there, he also found time to teach writing courses at Harvard and his alma mater, Florida's Eckerd College.

But while *Mystic River* might have made it easier for him to go his own way, Lebane says he would have branched out beyond Kenzie and Gennaro anyway. (The two detectives made their last appearance in 1999's *Prayers for Rain*.) Writing a long-term series—or even a stand alone hit—was never Lebane's goal.

"Very early on, I had a discussion with my agent (Ann Rittenberg) and my editor (Claire Wachtel) about my career," Lebane says. "And I said, 'Does everybody accept that I will never write a bestseller? Does everybody accept that I'm going to follow my own path?' And they said, 'Yeah. We're good.' And that's been our business model ever since."

Of course, that business model's been incredibly successful. But perhaps it'll be put to the test by Lebane's biggest departure yet: *The Given Day*, his long-awaited historical epic, which should hit bookshelves sometime next year. The first installment in a proposed trilogy, it chronicles a turning point in American labor relations—the Boston police strike of 1919.

The subject's close to Lebane's heart, both as a Bostonian and the son of a committed union man.

"In my family, (the labor movement) was the second religion to God," Lebane says. "These days, the debate's framed where somehow unions are bad or just one more special interest group with their hands out. It's like 1919 all over again. I wanted to bring back the day when (people remembered what unions meant)."

So if fans of Lebane's earlier books are turned off by a six hundred-page tome about post-World War I labor strife . . . well, Lebane doesn't exactly say "Tough luck." But he'd tell his readers the same thing he told his agent and editor all those years ago: He has to go his own way.

"I agree deeply with Humphrey Bogart's line that all you owe the audience is a good performance," Lebane says. "So do I owe people exactly the book they expect? Hell, no."



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PANDORA'S FORT

GILBERT M. STACK

The news came just as Father Murphy was finishing Mass for the mostly Irish soldiers at Fort Bridger. The priest faced his congregation, black cassock flapping in the light Wyoming breeze, white stole askew about his shoulders.

"Dominus vobiscum," he chanted. The Lord be with you.

"Et cum spiritu tuo," Corey Callaghan responded with the rest of the congregation. And the spirit with you.

In addition to the soldiers, the congregation included Corey's friend, Miss Pandora Parson, and his boxing trainer, Patrick O'Sullivan.

"Ite missa est," the priest continued. Go, this is the dismissal.

"Deo gracias," the soldiers responded. Thanks be to God.

As Father Murphy ended the Mass with the prologue to the Gospel of John, a nervous-looking private appeared at the edge of the congregation and began sidling between the soldiers as he made his way up to Sergeant Kelly. He got a glower for his efforts and wisely kept his mouth shut until the priest finished this final prayer. Then he stepped up next to Sergeant Kelly and whispered, "They're missing, Sarge."

"What's missing, son?"

"The carbines, six crates worth of carbines are missing from the stores."

A carbine was in essence a cavalryman's rifle—shorter than the infantry model to make it easier to use from horseback. It was not the sort of item to be easily overlooked in an impromptu inventory.

"Nonsense! How could they be missing?"

"I don't know, Sarge, but they're gone."

The sergeant fixed his cap firmly atop his head. "Show me!"

The two strode off toward the quartermaster's domain, leaving Corey standing thoughtfully behind them. He would have thought that with a hearing to decide if an officer deserved a court martial just about to begin there was quite enough happening at Fort Bridger this fine September morning. Apparently he had been wrong.



Joel Spector

Corey wondered if Miss Parson had overheard the exchange as well, but before he could ask, Patrick clapped him on the shoulder. "Come on, Corey, me lad, it's time to go congratulate Father."

Patrick moved on, assuming that Corey would follow him. Corey hesitated long enough to meet Miss Parson's eyes and make certain that she knew that she also was invited. Miss Parson rewarded Corey's efforts with a slight smile and started after the old man. Corey fell in beside her.

Patrick was already talking to the priest by the time they caught up with him. "Surely, Father, the angels themselves could not have sung so beautifully during the Mass."

Father Murphy's eyes sparkled with the compliment, although he pretended to reprimand Patrick for his exaggerations. "Now you've done it, Patrick. I'll have to hear your confession so I can forgive you for that little falsehood. Now truthfully, man, have you gone tone deaf or could you be wanting something from this poor little priest?"

"Poor?" Patrick asked. "Weren't you the big winner at last night's game?"

"Well, the good Lord did look kindly upon me," the priest admitted.

"And that's what I wanted to ask you about," Patrick continued. "You see, the good Lord hasn't been looking so kindly on me of late—not since I won all those hands on the train. And I was wondering if you might want to give Him another opportunity to bestow his blessings."

Corey sighed. Patrick was always trying to set up another card game. Their funds were dirt low at the moment, and Patrick ought to be saving what little they had left for the fight he was trying to arrange between Corey and a burly private named Higgins.

"I'm quite certain that we'll have plenty of opportunities to play later in the week," the priest said before changing his tone and feigning righteous indignation. "Unless you're suggesting we play a game on Sunday?"

"Oh no, Father," Patrick insisted, although Corey was certain that was exactly what he wanted to do.

The priest grinned. "Good, can you imagine what the Protestants would have to say about that?"

Miss Parson entered the conversation. "Nothing they haven't said already, I'll bet."

"Only more so," the priest agreed. "But truthfully, I give them enough reason to complain already. I draw the line at gambling on Sundays."

Everybody laughed and Father Murphy switched to another

subject. "What was that business with the private interrupting the service?"

Corey shrugged. "Something went missing at the quartermaster's."

Father Murphy lost interest immediately. "That doesn't sound important. I thought something big must have happened, what with him interrupting Mass."

He was wrong, of course. As matters turned out, the missing weapons were very important indeed.

The four had dinner with Lieutenant Ridgewood that evening. He was restricted to his quarters while he waited for his hearing—a polite gesture by Colonel Holworth under the circumstances. Ridgewood had made a critical error in judgment while traveling by train to Fort Bridger. Rather than remain with the men under his command and guard the army payroll entrusted to him, Ridgewood had chosen to play cards with several of the other passengers, including Patrick, Miss Parson, and Father Murphy. Three of Ridgewood's men had died as a result of this decision, and the lieutenant was now waiting to learn how the army viewed the situation. Was he a villain for his lapse in judgment or a hero for recapturing the stolen payroll and rescuing his surviving men?

The food was delivered from the officer's mess: a potato stew, with a faint hint of beef within it, and loaves of crusty white bread. Father Murphy, as usual, had brought his friend Jack to the table, and he generously shared the whiskey with Ridgewood, Corey, and Patrick. Miss Parson declined.

"So tell me, Thomas," Father Murphy suggested. "How does the inquiry look?"

Ridgewood was calm, as if he had made peace with the unpleasant business ahead of him. "I'm told Captain Harris arrived two hours ago, so we now have enough officers of sufficient rank to sit in judgment. We'll begin tomorrow. My counsel, Lieutenant Summers, doesn't think that the actual hearing will take very long—maybe just a single day."

Corey was surprised by how few officers were actually stationed at Fort Bridger. Apparently the army was both badly under strength and widely dispersed in 1874. Detachments nominally under Colonel Hayworth's command were permanently spread all over the West, so finding three officers senior to Ridgewood to sit in judgment over him had not been simple.

"The trial, Lieutenant," Patrick interrupted. "What's going to happen at the trial?"

"It's a hearing," Ridgewood patiently corrected him, "a simple inquiry to determine whether or not the facts of the case merit a

formal court martial. Frankly, I'm surprised the colonel is letting you share dinner with me. You are witnesses, after all."

"It probably just means he's already made up his mind," Father Murphy suggested, trying to make a jest of it. "He's already taken our depositions. He knows what we're going to say."

The truth was, Corey realized, there probably should be a trial. Ridgewood was a decent man and Corey liked him, but three of his men had been killed while under his command. Corey wasn't certain what the charges should be, but there was little doubt that the army would frown upon Ridgewood's decision to play cards instead of remain with his men and oversee the protection of the payroll the military had entrusted to him. It would take a miracle to keep Ridgewood out of prison or, for that matter, in the army.

Miss Parson had evidently come to a similar conclusion. "Will they give you an opportunity to resign, Lieutenant?"

Ridgewood sighed. "Well they haven't yet."

"Would you take it if they did, Thomas?" Father Murphy asked. "Perhaps I could speak to the Colonel on your behalf."

"Let me be very clear to all of you," Lieutenant Ridgewood said. His words were very precisely spoken, but there was no anger in them. "You are here as witnesses to what happened, both the good and the bad. I do not want you to take any action on my behalf. If the judges recommend a court martial, then that is what I deserve."

"I'm just trying to help, Thomas," Father Murphy protested.

"And you did help, Father, when you agreed to come here and tell what happened. I don't want any help in addition to that."

"So what do you think of these missing carbines?" Miss Parson asked, clearly trying to move the conversation in a new direction.

"It looks bad," Ridgewood told her. "Lieutenant Summers told me about it when he came in this afternoon. He's responsible for the fort's stores. It seems that six cases of new-issue Springfield carbines have gone missing."

"Missing?" Patrick asked. "Sounds like maybe he's the one who needs a lawyer."

"That is a lot of weapons," Father Murphy agreed.

"What does he think happened to them?" Miss Parson asked.

"He doesn't know, but whatever it was happened recently."

"How does he figure that?"

"He had just accounted for them about two months ago in anticipation of my arrival. In the normal course of events I would have taken over the quartermaster's duties from him and inventoried the stores in preparation for the transfer of authority. In

practical, if not technical terms, I'm replacing him. He's leaving the service at the end of the month."

"So how did they discover the theft?" Corey asked.

"The materials are technically only missing at this time," Lieutenant Ridgewood explained. "Lieutenant Summers is currently redoing the inventory, but in essence, an overzealous private was consolidating the stores when he discovered an empty crate in the pile. A little extra searching determined that a lot of the boxes were empty."

"Someone removed the rifles one by one?" Father Murphy asked.

"Carbines," Lieutenant Ridgewood corrected him. "Cavalrymen use carbines. Despite what Lieutenant Summers says, this could have been going on since the weapons first arrived at the fort. I doubt that I would have opened each of those crates to check their actual contents. He probably didn't either."

Miss Parson sought clarification. "So without the initiative of this private, you would likely have been blamed for the missing material?"

Ridgewood paused in his eating to ponder that question. "No," he said finally, "because this inquiry is likely to recommend a court martial, and I will likely never take over the responsibilities of quartermaster."

"But the thief couldn't have anticipated that," Father Murphy observed.

Corey was working out the next morning, running the perimeter of the fort, when Lieutenant Summers led a cavalry patrol out of Fort Bridger.

Perimeter was a somewhat misleading term at Bridger. When Corey had first come west he had expected to find forts like wooden castles dotting the landscape with huge palisades surrounding them to hold back the marauding hordes of Indians. What he found instead was that forts didn't have walls out West—at least none that he had yet seen did. Instead, the forts sprawled over the landscape like small towns and often housed more civilians than soldiers—people who were more interested in selling to the military market than protection.

What most distinguished forts from towns, as far as Corey could determine, were the hours soldiers kept. In most western towns, dawn saw only minimal stirrings out of doors. Families with animals sent a boy outside to care for them and a few occupations got men into the street early, but town life proper tended to start later in the morning.

Forts were more like farms in this regard. Soldiers were up at dawn or just before, preparing for the day's review, cleaning their weapons, and working both to maintain the fort and on the hundred-odd keep-busy tasks their officers had found for them. And sometimes, like this morning, they were riding out on patrol.

Twenty men and horses were streaming out of Bridger past Corey in two impressive files. Corey ran along beside them for a ways, hoping to pick up some gossip. It was easy to pick out Private Higgins in the line. The mountain of muscle was so big he actually seemed to dwarf the horse he was riding, which might explain why he was usually assigned to the quartermaster's office. It gave him less time in the saddle and easier access to the fort's food stores to keep up his strength.

The whole fort was anxiously awaiting the day Corey and Higgins would fight—not that any of them expected Corey to win. Higgins was the local favorite: big, tough, and with at least some professional training. If he had been in prime condition, Corey would have been certain he could take him. Corey was hard and fast, and Patrick had trained him to be smart with his fists. But Corey was not in prime condition. He had been beaten with rifle stocks a few weeks earlier in Cheyenne, and he had still not bounced fully back from those injuries. When he met Higgins in the ring, it would be a genuine battle between them.

Corey increased his pace despite a growing twinge in his side and came up alongside of Higgins. The barren terrain was rough, and he was forced to hop the occasional rock to maintain his place beside him. "Where are you heading, Private?" he asked. "I hope you won't be out so long we can't have our match."

Higgins laughed, his voice bellowing out of his massive chest. "You can't get out of fighting me that easily!" he insisted. "We're just racing out to bring back the dirty Mormon trader who stole a passel of carbines from the Lieutenant."

The news surprised Corey. "So you found out who did it?"

"Sure enough," the private agreed. "It just stands to reason. I turned him away from nosing around the stores myself earlier this week, and he's the only trader to leave Bridger since the carbines went missing."

Corey knew he wasn't a particularly bright man, but it still troubled him that he couldn't follow the private's reasoning. "So how did the trader get the carbines?"

Higgins shrugged. "He stole them. I guess we'll find out how when he confesses."

Corey was about to respond to that, but Sergeant Kelly called

out from farther up the line. "That's enough talking back there, Higgins! Callaghan, you'll have to get your gossip someplace else!"

Corey peeled away from the file to complete his workout.

"Corey, me lad, you move like cold molasses. Where's your spark? Where's your timing?"

Corey threw another combination at the air in front of him. There was a twinge in his shoulder and a sore spot in his ribs, but other than that he was almost completely recovered from Cheyenne. The rhythm and the speed would return in time.

Of course, there wouldn't be so much pressure for Corey to fight if Patrick could stop losing all of their money in poker games.

"What's wrong with you, lad?"

Corey stopped boxing. "What's wrong with me? What's wrong with me is that I got badly beaten keeping *you* from getting lynched. Now why don't you stop complaining and start helping me work out some moves that don't aggravate my injuries?"

"Complaining? Me?" Patrick strode up to Corey. "What are you talking about, lad? The only one doing any whining around here is you. Now quit your jawing and get back to work!"

The breath caught in Corey's chest and his hands clenched into fists. "Whining?"

"Gentlemen," Miss Parson interrupted, "Father Murphy is approaching."

Corey forced himself to open his hands. Patrick stared at him for a moment longer, then turned his back on the boxer and faced the priest. "Welcome, Father, how are you?"

"I'm feeling quite well today, Patrick, and yourself?"

"Good, good, looking forward to our game tonight."

Corey felt his hands clenching again. "Patrick!"

Father Murphy ignored Patrick's statement and stepped past him, offering Corey his hand. "And how are your injuries today?"

Corey forced himself to relax again so he could shake the priest's hand. "I'm healing, Father, thank you for asking." He shot a glance at Patrick. "Another couple of weeks and I'll be fit as a fiddle."

"We don't have a couple of weeks, Corey," Patrick reminded him. "Our money is running out, unless I get lucky at the table tonight."

"Damn it, Patrick! Your luck at the tables is the reason we're out of money!"

"Language, Corey," Father Murphy reminded him. "There's a lady present."

"And a priest," Patrick added.

Father Murphy turned his back on both Patrick and Corey and

stepped over to Miss Parson. "Please forgive me for not greeting you first as a gentleman should. How are you this fine morning?"

"I'm quite well, Father," she answered. "Have you any news?"

"Well, our hearing has been delayed once again. It seems that Lieutenant Ridgewood's counsel led a patrol off toward Utah this morning."

"If that don't beat all," Patrick complained. "The sergeant asked us not to schedule our fight until after Corey testifies at the hearing." He winked. "They seem to think he's going to get busted up."

Corey decided not to exasperate Patrick by applauding the delay. "I saw that patrol leave this morning. Higgins is in it. He says a Mormon trader stole the carbines."

"That's what they were saying," Father Murphy agreed. "It may well be Lieutenant Summers's final patrol. He's resigned his commission, you know—leaves the service at the end of the month."

"I'm surprised," Miss Parson observed, "that they would let the lieutenant lead this patrol as he was responsible for the missing materials."

"I wondered about that myself," Father Murphy said. "It appears that he *assumed* this command as opposed to having it thrust upon him."

"What precisely does that mean?"

"Well, as far as I can figure it, Lieutenant Summers brought his suspicions regarding the Mormon trader to Colonel Holworth last night, who took the matter under advisement. This morning the lieutenant rode out on his own authority to bring the trader back."

"On his own authority?"

"Precisely. I heard about it all from Captain Danforth who seems quite amused by Lieutenant Summers's actions. He sees it as an attempt by the lieutenant to defend his honor. It's not clear how the colonel sees it."

"I cannot believe that they allowed the lieutenant to do this," Miss Parson said. "Why didn't Colonel Holworth send out another patrol and order the lieutenant back?"

"I don't understand the problem," Patrick confessed. "What does it matter which officer brings the Mormon back?"

"Patrick," Father's Murphy's voice was quiet. "I am not one to cast aspersions, but surely it must be obvious to everyone that Lieutenant Summers is a suspect in the disappearance of the carbines."

"But he's just trying to clear his name," Patrick insisted.

Father Murphy considered this reply for a few moments, then slowly nodded his head. "Yes, Patrick, that's certainly one way to view his actions."



"What do you mean you're off to play cards again?" Corey spit the words at his trainer, face flushing with anger and exasperation. They'd have no money left at all at the rate Patrick was losing it.

"Well, Corey, me lad, someone has to pay the bills around here since you're taking so long recovering from your little tussle in Cheyenne."

"That *little tussle* was a beating from a lynch mob bent on stringing you up."

"Now, now, Corey, I've taken a lot of beatings in the ring myself over the years, and I've seen a lot of fine young boxers recover as well. We both know you're healing slow, and we can both figure out why. Your heart's just not in it this time." The old man shook his head in sorrow. "I never thought me Rock Quarry Callaghan would lose his fire."

Corey was very close to hauling back and hitting the old man. He chose his words carefully, trying to keep his temper in check. "There is a huge difference, Patrick, between being hit with fists and being hit with rifle stocks."

Patrick shrugged, an exaggerated gesture clearly intended to let him claim he had conceded the argument to Corey. "If you say so, lad. Still, I know you took down that fellow Perkins on the train. I don't see how fighting Private Higgins could be that different."

Corey's fist was quivering with desire to strike the old man. He took a very deep breath—so deep it made his still healing ribs hurt. He held the breath as long as he was able. Patrick had gone mad to suggest that there was any comparison between a five second street brawl and a fight in a ring. For God's sake, Corey had kicked Perkins between the legs and thrown him off the train, not beaten him into submission.

He let the breath out. He was calmer now and infinitely more melancholy. "Patrick, do you want to gamble tonight so badly that you'll keep insulting me until I walk away from you?"

"I'm not insulting you, Corey," Patrick sputtered.

Corey's spirits continued to deflate. "Well, let's be very clear, then, about what you want to do because you've almost succeeded. I'm very close to walking away from you."

Patrick visibly brightened, clearly not perceiving the threat in Corey's words. "Well then, I'll just go meet the boys and Miss Parson."

"Wait a moment." Corey put a restraining hand on Patrick's shoulder. It was a strong hand, despite Corey's injuries.

Patrick stopped cold.

"How much money do I have left?" Corey asked him.

Patrick squirmed. "We have a little more than twelve dollars."

Corey let the change from *I* to *we* pass for the moment. He knew that Patrick had long ago gambled away his share of their money. "And how much have you put away to bet on my next fight?"

Patrick squirmed again and tugged at his shirt collar with a finger. "Why there's twelve dollars," he said at last.

Corey did the figures in his head. It took him a while. He wasn't like Miss Parson. He didn't like counting or arithmetic. "So there's actually twenty-four dollars?"

Patrick squirmed again, but told the truth. "No, me lad, there's only twelve."

It was as Corey feared. "Patrick, why are you pushing me to get into a fight before I'm ready when we don't have enough money left to make betting on it worthwhile? There's not going to be a purse out here. The only money we'll make will be from your bets on me."

"Don't worry, lad, I'll increase our stake at the tables tonight."

"No, Patrick, you won't!" Corey told him. "You never win when you play cards."

"Now, lad, you know that's not true. On the train—"

"The card game on the train was the only time you've won big in all of the years I've known you. Once in a while you break even. Usually, you lose. If you play cards tonight, we'll have less than twelve dollars to bet when I go up against Higgins."

"Corey, lad, you have to have a little faith in me."

"I've let you gamble away a lot of my money over the years. I never saw the harm in it until tonight. Now I do! We both know I'm not ready to fight. Oh, I'll beat him, but he's good enough and big enough to bust me up first. And we're not going to be able to win enough to let me heal properly because you can't stop playing cards!"

"Corey," Patrick said again. "Just have a little faith. I won't let you down."

The older man walked away shaking his head.

"The problem is," Corey muttered, "you already have."

Patrick avoided Corey the next morning—not an easy thing to do considering that they shared a tent. But when Corey went out for his conditioning run, Patrick pretended to still be asleep. It wasn't unusual for Patrick to send Corey out alone in the morning—the old man hated to get up early—but it was strange for him to pretend to be sleeping. It added to Corey's sense of coming calamity.

When Corey returned from his run, Patrick was gone, another

bad sign, as it was still early for him to be up and about. Corey went to the fort mess, finagled his breakfast, and endured the good-natured ribbing of soldiers who were certain that Private Higgins was going to destroy him in a couple of days. Corey's heart wasn't in the byplay. All that he could think about was that the fight would be for naught. Win or lose, he was going to get busted up, and they weren't going to make enough money to get by.

Corey didn't mind getting hurt in the ring. It was part of the job, and he liked fighting, but in the past he'd been risking injury to win something. This time, thanks to Patrick, that wasn't true. This time he didn't know why he would be fighting.

Miss Parson found Corey a little after noon. The stitch in his side was still troubling him, preventing him from putting real power in his right-hand punches. It was a bad thing. Corey had a fine left jab to set up opponents, but it was the thundering right cross that really knocked them back on their heels. Without the right cross, he'd have real problems with Higgins.

Corey halted his workout when he saw Miss Parson. "Good afternoon."

Miss Parson offered him a pleasant smile. "How are you feeling today? It looks like you're finally getting some freedom of movement back on that right side."

Corey felt his ribs. The flesh was tender, but not nearly as tender as it had been. "It's healing," he agreed. "Another couple of weeks and I'll be fit as a fiddle."

Miss Parson arched an eyebrow. Corey knew that she had overheard many of Patrick and his arguments on this point, but she asked the question anyway. "So why are you planning to fight Private Higgins the day after we testify?"

Corey tried to smile. "Patrick arranges the fights."

"Mr. Callaghan, if you're not fit . . ."

Corey shrugged. "It's embarrassing to admit this to a woman, but you, Patrick, and me have been through a lot together. The truth is we're out of money. It's either let Patrick set up a fight or get a job."

Miss Parson cringed. As a professional gambler, she was probably the only woman of Corey's acquaintance who understood and respected his aversion to working like ordinary men.

"Frankly, I'd have fought Higgins already if the sergeant hadn't asked us to wait until after the hearing. I need to fight Higgins before Patrick loses all of our money."

Miss Parson cringed again.

"That tears it," Corey said. "How much did he lose last night?"

"Seven or eight dollars," Miss Parson answered.

"Jesus, Mary, and Joseph," Corey prayed, "give me the strength not to beat him senseless." He turned to Miss Parson. "I did everything but beg him not to play last night, but the more he loses the more he feels he's got to prove himself to me by going back to the tables and winning some money."

Miss Parson's voice was very quiet, making Corey strain to hear her. "I've seen it many times. I make a good deal of my living off men like Mr. O'Sullivan."

Corey stopped worrying about himself for a moment and really looked at Miss Parson. She was a pretty little thing with long red hair, a sprinkling of freckles, and a look of soul-piercing guilt upon her face.

"I have never before been in a position," she confessed, "where I was consistently taking money from a friend."

Corey took a deep breath and held it. She was right, of course; much of Patrick's money was flowing into her purse. But no one was forcing Patrick to join those games. He released the breath in a long drawn-out sigh.

"If it weren't going to you, it would be going to someone else. The real problem is Patrick can't stop playing cards."

"I . . . would it be improper to offer you a loan?"

Corey felt his face flush with embarrassment. "I won't take charity, Miss Parson, but it was kind of you to offer." He shook his head. "I guess the fight is off. There's really no point to it if we've nothing left to bet on it."

"You've really nothing left?" Miss Parson asked.

"Oh, I've got a couple dollars in my pocket. At least I do until Patrick wants to play cards again tonight."

For the first time in their conversation the looks of sympathy and guilt on Miss Parson's face was replaced by one of irritation. "Give it to me!" she demanded, her voice alive with sudden authority.

Without stopping to think about it, Corey reached into his pocket, pulled out a jumble of coins, and passed them to Miss Parson.

She glanced at them, then dropped them into her bag. "Three dollars and seventeen cents," she told him.

Corey looked at her expectantly, waiting for her to explain what was happening.

"Honestly, Mr. Callaghan," Miss Parson snapped. Then she took hold of herself and laughed. "You are such a mixture of contradictions. You let no one stand against you in the ring. You've held your ground against lynch mobs and train robbers. And yet an old

man asks you for your last dollar so he can lose it gambling and you fold immediately.

"Here's what I suggest. Let me hold this money for you as your agent, and I'll bet it on you when you fight Private Higgins. This way you'll at least have a little something left over to hold off the need for a job."

Corey considered that for a moment. She was right, of course. He would give the money to Patrick if the old man asked for it. That would have to change! "I think Patrick and I are going to have to start doing things differently. He's a great trainer but a lousy manager."

"I'm sorry to have to agree, Mr. Callaghan, but I do."

"It's not that he's a bad man," Corey said. "He really does care what happens to me."

"He loves you like a son," Miss Parson agreed, "but that doesn't mean he can stop gambling for you."

Cheers erupted throughout the fort, followed closely by the sound of galloping horses. Corey whipped around in time to see a group of cavalymen racing into Fort Bridger in an excited, disorganized cluster, rather than the traditional orderly file. Corey, with Miss Parson beside him, ran toward Colonel Holworth's headquarters to catch the news.

Colonel Holworth, Captain Danforth, several knots of enlisted men, and a growing crowd of civilians had preceded them, gathering in front of the building to meet the riders who were shouting out their triumph as they approached.

"We caught him!"

"We got him!"

"The dirty saint couldn't get away!"

The captain had picked up on the enthusiasm and was grinning with excitement. The colonel was frowning at the very undisciplined displays.

Lieutenant Summers rode to the front of the group, leapt from his horse with a flourish, and saluted the two senior officers. "Lieutenant Summers reporting, sir. I have captured the thief and brought him back to Fort Bridger for questioning. The stolen property was still in his possession. Private Higgins!"

Private Higgins rode forward, leading a horse with a man tied across the saddle. As the two approached, it became clear that the bound man had been badly beaten. His face was covered with dried blood, his nose had been broken, and his eyes were swollen mostly shut. It looked to Corey as if Higgins had used the Mormon to prepare for their coming fight, but there was no way that the trader could have stood on his own to endure such abuse.

If this had all been done with Higgins's fists, then someone was holding the trader up while the private punched him.

The captain stepped off the porch, still grinning with enthusiasm. "Good work, Lieutenant. You got a confession?"

"Yes, sir!" Lieutenant Summers responded.

The man tied to the horse shook his head and groaned. It sounded to Corey remarkably like the word "no."

Colonel Holworth stepped off the porch to stand next to Captain Danforth. "Where are the rest of the men? You recovered all of the missing weapons?"

The lieutenant's boisterous confidence faltered. He seemed to choose his words with great care. "I left a detachment to bring back the merchant's wagons."

"And the missing weapons are with them?"

"Yes, sir!" The snap was back in the lieutenant's voice. "All that the merchant still retained."

Corey saw the colonel's frown deepen. "I see. Come inside and report. Higgins, take that man to the doctor and *don't* hurt him any more. The rest of you men return to your duties."

Colonel Holworth wheeled, remounted the porch, and strode back into his headquarters. The captain and lieutenant followed him. The other soldiers slowly began to disperse.

Corey turned to Miss Parson. "Well, now that that's resolved, I guess we'll be able to get on with this hearing. I guess I'll be fighting Higgins in a couple of days."

Miss Parson was still looking at the door to the colonel's headquarters. Corey wasn't certain that she had even heard him. "I wonder," she said, "just how many carbines the merchant had left."

Corey didn't see Patrick until nightfall when the old man suddenly appeared outside their lodgings, talking as if there were no disagreements between them.

"Ah, Corey, me lad, there you are. Where have you been keeping yourself? Quite a bit of excitement we had today."

Corey's anger still simmered, and Patrick's pleasant pretense that they weren't fighting actually stoked his furnace. He didn't like indirect and clever attacks, and he suspected he knew what Patrick wanted from him.

"Quite a lot of excitement," Corey agreed.

"And they only got three carbines back," Patrick continued, "three carbines out of sixty. The colonel is supposed to be very angry."

Corey tried to wrap his mind around these facts. He was so sur-

prised by the news that he forgot about his anger. "Only three carbines?"

"Aye, the colonel is very angry," Patrick said again. "He says it's an embarrassment to the entire fort, and everyone says the colonel hates to be embarrassed. At least they caught the culprit with his hands still dirty."

"But what happened to the other weapons?" Corey asked. "How long was he gone from the fort anyway?"

"Two days," Patrick told him. "And they don't know what he did with them, although they tried to beat it out of him. He must have sold or stashed them, I guess."

"I guess," Corey agreed, still having trouble grasping the scenario.

"Anyway, that's not what's important," Patrick continued. "With the theft resolved and Lieutenant Summers back, Captain Danforth tells me the hearing will be held tomorrow and you can fight Higgins on Thursday night."

Corey remembered his anger at Patrick. He knew the old man too well. Patrick wanted something from him tonight and it wasn't hard to guess what. "And?"

"Well, I had a bit of bad luck at the table last night," Patrick confessed, "and I need to rebuild my stake. How much money do you have left on you?"

Corey's fury roared instantly from simmer to full boil. "Nothing! I've already given you everything."

"Now, Corey, me lad," Patrick adopted his most cajoling tone. "I know you better than that. You always hold something back. If you let me have it, I'll win enough tonight to make this fight worthwhile."

Corey's voice trembled with the effort to control his anger. "I have nothing left!"

Patrick threw up his hands in exasperation. "Well, what did you do with it, lad?"

"I spent it!" Corey spat. It was even true. He had already spent the money on his own bets.

"Spent it?" Patrick sputtered. "Why of all the reckless, selfish, irresponsible things to do! What could you be think—"

Patrick never finished the question.

He also never saw the blow.

Corey's fist shot out in a wicked right cross that took Patrick on the side of the chin and spun him halfway around. If he had kept on his feet, he might have completed the full circle. Instead his body flung out full behind him and he landed on his face in the dirt.

Corey's side burned from the blow, a very bad sign with a fight brewing for Thursday.

He spun on his heel and stalked off into the night without bothering to check if Patrick was conscious or not.

"That was strange," Miss Parson whispered as she was escorted out of the hearing a very short time after entering it.

"What was?" Corey asked.

"Mr. Corey Callaghan," the sergeant announced.

"The colonel didn't let me expand upon anything," Miss Parson whispered. "I think they have it in for the good lieutenant."

"Mr. Corey Callaghan," the sergeant said again, staring directly at the boxer.

"Right here," Corey answered, as if the soldier hadn't recognized him.

The sergeant held the door open for Corey and he walked into the room. Seven men were already present. At the head table sat three men in impressive uniforms. Like most civilians, Corey was not adept at reading military insignia, but he recognized Colonel Holworth and Captain Danforth and assumed the third man must be Captain Harris.

Lieutenant Ridgewood sat at another table, facing the three officers, with Lieutenant Summers beside him. Lieutenant Franks sat at a separate table also facing the three officers.

"Mr. Callaghan," Colonel Holworth greeted Corey, "thank you for appearing before us today. Hopefully we can quickly put this whole disgraceful matter behind us."

"Of course, Colonel, how can I help?"

"Just swear the oath and we'll ask you a few questions."

The sergeant brought a Bible and Corey swore to tell the truth. Then he sat in the chair near the panel of officer judges and Lieutenant Franks stood to question him.

"Mr. Callaghan, I'd just like to walk you through the events that led to the robbery of the payroll and the murder of three soldiers."

Corey awkwardly cleared his throat. He didn't like being here, and he didn't like all of these officers sitting here staring at him, but he couldn't stay quiet and let a blatant falsehood stroll past him.

"Excuse me, sir," he said, "but the payroll was never actually stolen. I gather the bandits didn't even move it. Lieutenant Ridgewood kept them from getting it off the train."

Lieutenant Franks frowned. "Are you saying the robbers did not take possession of the money?"

Corey thought about that. "No, sir, I'm saying that the bandits got into the railcar but never got out with the money. It's like getting into the bank but not getting back outside with the safe."

Colonel Holworth interrupted. "Try to just answer the questions, Mr. Callaghan."

Corey thought that that was what he was trying to do, but he knew better than to argue with a colonel. "Aye, sir."

Lieutenant Franks resumed his questioning. "Is it true, Mr. Callaghan, that you observed Lieutenant Ridgewood spend most of the train trip before the attempted robbery playing poker and keeping company with a young woman?"

"Aye."

"And is it true that two of the players in the poker game were colluding in the robbery?"

Corey blinked, not at all certain what it was that Lieutenant Franks was asking him.

Colonel Holworth seemed to sense Corey's confusion. "Were two of the card players part of the outlaw gang?"

"Oh, aye, that's how Miss Parson figured it."

"Yes," Lieutenant Franks said, stretching out the word with distaste. Evidently, he was not one of Miss Parson's fans. "And is it true that these two people abetted Lieutenant Ridgewood in winning a lot of money?"

Again Corey did not understand.

"They fed him cards so that he would win," Colonel Holworth explained.

"Aye, sir," Corey agreed, "not that Lieutenant Ridgewood knew that was happening. He—"

"And is it true," Lieutenant Franks interrupted, "that you were instrumental in recovering the payroll?"

Corey didn't waste any time trying to figure out that question. He just looked straight to the colonel.

"Could he have gotten the payroll back without you?"

"Aye, sir."

"And is—"

Lieutenant Franks broke off his next question and looked at Corey in surprise. "Did you say yes? The question was—"

This time Corey interrupted *him*. "I understood the question, sir. Lieutenant Ridgewood did not need my help to get the payroll back."

"But Lieutenant Ridgewood's own report—"

Lieutenant Franks broke off again, stalked over to his table, and shuffled through his papers. When he found the part he wanted, he read directly from the page: "Furthermore, I'd like to commend Mr. Corey Callaghan for his bravery and steadfastness during the action. Without his help I feel confident that the payroll would not have been recovered and Sergeant

Matlick would not have been saved."

"Are you saying the lieutenant lied when filing this report?"

"No, sir."

"Then you were instrumental!"

"No, sir."

"Then—"

"Lieutenant Franks," Colonel Holworth interrupted. "This is getting us nowhere, and the longer this draws out the worse for all of us. Mr. Callaghan, as much as it pains me to ask, would you please explain yourself?"

"It's a matter of fighting tactics," Corey explained. "There were two plans: Lieutenant Ridgewood's and Miss Parson's. Lieutenant Ridgewood's plan depended only on himself. He wanted to cross the cars, fire on the outlaws through the doors, then enter the car, rescue his men, and secure the payroll."

Lieutenant Franks scoffed. "That is absurd."

"But that is what he did, sir. Just with Miss Parson's plan, he had to do it from the other end of the railcar after traveling across the roof. He'd been pistol-whipped in the head and his balance was bad, but he agreed to take the added risk to surprise the outlaws because he thought it would give his surviving men a better chance."

Lieutenant Franks clearly didn't like that answer. "But what about the brake and your fight with Perkins?"

"Those parts of the plan weren't necessary—they just made taking the car easier."

"This is all irrelevant," Colonel Holworth announced. "What's important here is that Lieutenant Ridgewood wasn't yet under my command. He hadn't reported to me yet. We should just send him back to Washington and let them court martial him."

There were a few more questions, but by then it was obvious even to Corey that his answers didn't matter.

"How much do you like Lieutenant Ridgewood?" Miss Parson asked.

"He's a good man," Corey said. "I like him."

"And what do you think about Lieutenant Summers?" she continued.

Corey shrugged. "I don't think much of him either way."

"Well I don't like him," Miss Parson confided. "I think he's too clever and too slick, and he never once opened his mouth in that hearing to defend Lieutenant Ridgewood or ask a question."

Corey thought back on his own time before the hearing. Miss

Parson was right. Lieutenant Summers hadn't asked any questions. "Should he have been doing that?"

"He's the counsel for the defense. He should have been objecting when Lieutenant Franks asked leading questions, distorting what really happened. He should have been asking questions that showed how brave Lieutenant Ridgewood was and how he kept checking on his men despite playing cards. He didn't do anything to protect Lieutenant Ridgewood in that hearing."

"Oh." Corey pondered Lieutenant Summers's lack of action, trying to understand it. Finally he asked Miss Parson her opinion. "So why do you think he wasn't doing his job?"

"I don't know for sure, but I think it is because he's already angered the colonel over losing those carbines and didn't want to further annoy him when the colonel has already made up his mind concerning Lieutenant Ridgewood's fate."

"I really didn't understand what was happening in there," Corey admitted. "All Colonel Holworth seemed concerned about was his embarrassment."

"That's it precisely," Miss Parson said. "Colonel Holworth is embarrassed that Lieutenant Ridgewood was playing cards when his men were killed. He fears it will reflect poorly upon him. He wants to make Lieutenant Ridgewood and this problem go away."

"And there's nothing we can do about it," Corey finished.

"Well . . ."

"Is there something we can do about it?"

"Well, maybe, but it would further embarrass Colonel Holworth."

"I don't care about him."

"He's a powerful man, Mr. Callaghan. It's not smart to make him angry."

Corey thought about that. Usually, if he made an official unhappy he just moved on to another town, but Colonel Holworth held authority over a very large territory and would have officer friends everywhere else. "Is this why you asked how much I like Lieutenant Ridgewood?"

"Yes, I think I have a way to help him, but it would work better if I have your assistance."

"Count me in," Corey said. If Miss Parson wanted his help she would have it. Ridgewood really didn't matter here. Corey stood by his friends.

"Thank you," Miss Parson said. "I really don't know why I'm doing this. I don't like to get involved in other people's business, but that smug Lieutenant Summers makes me angry, and those foolish officers over him will let him get away with everything."

Corey's brief moment of clarity—standing firmly beside his friend—deserted him. "What does Lieutenant Summers have to do with this?"

Miss Parson answered him matter-of-factly, her mind already turning to the other elements of her plan. "He stole the Springfield carbines."

That was big news to Corey. "He did?"

"Of course, isn't it obvious?"

Corey didn't think it was obvious, but before he could admit this, Miss Parson was talking again.

"Now we don't have much time if we're to pull this off tonight. First we'll have to get Father Murphy to help us, and then we'll have to convince Lieutenant Ridgewood to go along. Why don't you go ahead to the lieutenant's. I'll meet you both outside his quarters just as quickly as I can."

She was walking briskly off into the town before Corey could ask her about the plan.

An hour passed before Miss Parson caught up to Corey and Lieutenant Ridgewood.

"What's this Mr. Callaghan is telling me about a plan to prove my innocence?" the lieutenant asked her. He'd been rather frustrated that Corey had known none of the details of Miss Parson's scheme.

"Not your innocence," Miss Parson corrected him, her tone hushed far lower than the lieutenant's. "Please talk softly. As far as I can see, your guilt or innocence is irrelevant to the hearing. They're really trying to decide what kind of an officer you are. We need to do something that shows them you're smart and dependable."

Corey was confused, but he knew enough about Miss Parson to keep his mouth closed while she worked to gain Lieutenant Ridgewood's cooperation.

"Well, yes, that might tilt the balance in my favor," the lieutenant conceded, "if I could prove myself, so to speak."

"Exactly," Miss Parson said.

"But there's no way to do that now," the lieutenant objected. "We'd need a full-blown Indian attack or something like it—let them see I can keep my head under fire."

"What if you recovered all of the missing carbines?" Miss Parson suggested. "Wouldn't that show how valuable you are?"

"I don't—" the lieutenant started, then broke off, eyes widening with surprise. "You know where the missing carbines are? I thought that Mormon trader got away with them."

"Lieutenant, if you could recover those carbines do you think that will help your case?"

The lieutenant thought about that for a moment. "Well it certainly couldn't hurt, but I don't know if it will help. So much really depends on what the colonel wants to happen."

Corey saw Miss Parson's eyes flash and he realized that Lieutenant Ridgewood had touched upon the core of her plan. Suddenly, he could see that all of her maneuvering was about Colonel Holworth, but he still didn't grasp what Miss Parson wanted to make happen.

She made no reference to any of these matters to Lieutenant Ridgewood. Instead she asked, "Shall we try?"

The lieutenant made his decision. "Why not? Where are these carbines you've discovered?"

"I think that before I tell you that you'd better don your sidearm."

The lieutenant agreed and stepped into his quarters.

"Mr. Callaghan, you had best be ready for trouble. Like most of the officers, Lieutenant Summers lodges away from the central buildings of the fort in the more civilian parts of Bridger. We should be noticed going into his house. He should come running to keep us from disclosing what we find."

"How sure of this are you?"

"The carbines were there this afternoon while you were giving your testimony, piled between the wall and the bed and covered with a simple blanket. It looks like he's constructing large boxes to ship them in."

"You've already been inside?"

"And it's quite likely I was seen either entering or leaving. If the lieutenant has any brains he's making plans to move the carbines tonight. But it won't be as easy to get the weapons out as it was to get them in."

"I don't understand."

"Look, these are new-issue carbines. Every cavalryman in the fort got a brand-new weapon, with the rest waiting here until Colonel Holworth can distribute them to his detached units. It was easy for Lieutenant Summers and an accomplice or two to walk out of the quartermaster's office with one of those extra carbines at the end of the day. They carried the new carbines with them to the lieutenant's house but left without them. The next day they did the same thing all over again, arriving in the morning without a weapon but leaving with one. They could have done it in under a month. We're only talking about sixty guns."

"But why?"

"To sell them, of course. Lieutenants don't make very much money. Those weapons represent a retirement bonus—a nest egg

to let *Mister* Summers set himself up in business when he leaves the service."

Corey considered that for a moment. "That makes sense. Do you think he was in it alone?"

"Well, the lieutenant would have to have at least some help from within the quartermaster's office."

"Higgins," Corey guessed.

"Quite probably," Miss Parson agreed. "He and Lieutenant Summers seem unusually close, and he did beat that trader quite fiercely to extract a false confession. It's also likely that Sergeant Kelly would have to know what was happening."

The door to Lieutenant Ridgewood's quarters opened and the officer emerged, Colt pistol in its customary place, secure under the flap of the lieutenant's holster. "Well then," he said, addressing Miss Parson. "Where exactly are these wayward carbines?" "Right this way," Miss Parson answered.

Lieutenant Ridgewood eyed the small house suspiciously, but Miss Parson walked right up to the front door, rapped once, and entered without giving the owner a legitimate opportunity to answer her knock.

Corey followed immediately, unwilling to leave Miss Parson alone in what could be dangerous circumstances. Lieutenant Ridgewood followed more slowly. Save for the three of them, the two-room building was deserted.

Miss Parson walked directly through the sparsely furnished first room and into the rear of the house. *Sparsely furnished* was an exaggeration—the front room was completely devoid of furniture save for the three upended half-barrel chairs with a full barrel placed between them for a table.

"He only rented this building three months ago," Miss Parson informed them, her voice carrying from the back room. "That in and of itself is suspicious since he's leaving the service at the end of the month."

Corey stepped through the doorway and joined her in the back room. Saws, hammers, and nails were strewn about, as were the remains of two long, coffin-shaped boxes.

"When you add to that, that he was responsible for the missing carbines and raced off to discover three of them on that Mormon trader, well it seemed obvious that someone should look into this place."

"We're talking about Lieutenant Summers, I take it?" Lieutenant Ridgewood asked as he followed them into the back room.

"Yes."

"I don't see how he thought he could get away with it."

"Why would anyone have been suspicious? It should have been months before those crates were opened. You said yourself that you wouldn't have opened them to count the weapons when you took over the fort's stores. By the time they were opened, Lieutenant Summers would have been long gone and you would have been blamed for the loss."

"But an overzealous private spoiled the whole plan," a new voice announced.

Corey and Lieutenant Ridgewood's heads snapped around to find Lieutenant Summers standing in the doorway covering them with his army Colt.

Miss Parson did not flinch. "I've been expecting you, Lieutenant Summers. To tell the truth, I thought you would be here before us."

"I was," he acknowledged affably. "I just thought it better to let you get inside where I could bring matters to a quieter resolution."

"Well that fits nicely in accord with my plans," Miss Parson said. "I assume Private Higgins—"

"You can't fire that pistol, Summers!" Lieutenant Ridgewood announced, rudely interrupting Miss Parson. "If you fire that gun, everyone in Fort Bridger will hear you and come running. I'm placing you under arrest. The best thing you can do is to submit quietly and try to get a reduced prison sentence."

Miss Parson sighed, clearly unhappy with Lieutenant Ridgewood's interference.

Lieutenant Summers appeared amused by the interruption. "Right you are, Ridgewood," he said, taking a quick glance at his pocket watch. "But in less than five minutes, Sergeant Kelly will start drilling some of the men in firing their carbines and that should cover the sound of my pistol quite nicely. Then I won't have to worry about a shorter prison sentence."

"Lieutenant Ridgewood," Miss Parson said, her voice quiet but firm. "I would appreciate—"

Lieutenant Ridgewood interrupted her again. "Why did you do it, Summers? You're an officer and a gentleman. Why would you throw all of that away?"

"An officer and a gentleman?" Summers asked. "And what has that gotten me? I'm thirty-seven years old and I'm still just a lieutenant. And I'm going to keep on being a mere lieutenant until enough captains get promoted or die off to make room for me in their ranks. I was a colonel during the war, but I've got too bow and scrape to everyone just like some new peacock out of West Point. And you ask why I did it?"

"We make a pathetic thirteen hundred per year paid in script no Western shopkeeper will accept at face value, but every year some idiot in the House of Representatives gets up and argues that they should lower our pay because 'learning to tighten one's belt' is good for a young man.

"Well, I'm not young anymore! And I'm tired of waiting for my seniority to finally get me promoted. Those rifles are worth more than a year's pay to me—and that's enough to set me up fine when I get out of the Army."

"Except you're going to jail," Ridgewood reminded him.

"I'm not going to jail," Summers said. "Another couple of minutes and you'll be dead!"

"Lieutenant Ridgewood," Miss Parson repeated, attempting to insert herself back into the conversation. "I would appreciate it if you would remember that we did not come here to send Lieutenant Summers to prison, but to gain a favorable verdict in your hearing. If we had simply wanted to recover the stolen carbines, we could have brought Colonel Holworth with us."

She focused all of her considerable charm on the man holding the pistol. "Lieutenant Summers, please believe me when I say that your plan to shoot us will not go unnoticed. Father Murphy knows where we are and is coming even as we speak with many of Fort Bridger's leading citizens. It is quite probable that were I to scream they are already close enough to hear me."

Lieutenant Summers directed his pistol away from Lieutenant Ridgewood and pointed it directly at Miss Parson. "I think I'll just have to take that chance."

Corey saw an opportunity in this moment of distraction, but he could not risk lunging past Ridgewood to get to Summers or trying to step between Summers and Miss Parson—not with a cocked pistol already pointed at her. Instead, Corey took an action that went against the grain but which offered the greatest chance of Miss Parson surviving and Lieutenant Summers paying for his crime.

He reached out with the lightning speed of a short jab, grabbed Ridgewood by the pistol belt, and pulled the startled officer behind him.

Summers snapped his pistol around to cover Corey, but the boxer was not advancing on him and the lieutenant did not fire.

"What are you doing, Callaghan?" Lieutenant Ridgewood sputtered.

"Yes, what are you doing?" Lieutenant Summers asked.

Corey looked Lieutenant Summers straight in the eye. "Now it doesn't matter if Sergeant Kelly starts rifle practice. You can't

shoot Ridgewood first with me standing between the two of you. That means if you fire that gun, Ridgewood will have time to draw his pistol. If you shoot me or Miss Parson, Lieutenant Ridgewood will kill you!"

Lieutenant Summers blanched.

He took a step back and Corey stepped forward with him, trying to make certain that Lieutenant Summers could not make enough distance to somehow angle a free shot at Ridgewood. Summers stepped back again and Corey followed into the front room.

A massive hand grabbed Corey's right arm and spun the boxer across the room and into the wall.

"Oh thank God!" Miss Parson said.

Private Higgins got a grip on the back of Corey's head and attempted to slam the boxer's forehead against the wall. Corey got his hands up and blunted the private's efforts.

"Take it outside, Mr. Callaghan," Miss Parson called out. "And try to make it look like he's getting the better of you until I give the word."

Since Higgins *was* getting the better of him, Corey found it easy to make it look that way. Getting the bigger man outside could prove more difficult. He hunched his body down hard toward the floor to break Higgins's hold on his neck—simultaneously frustrating an unsportsmanlike knee to his kidney—then twisted and drove two hard lefts to Higgins's stomach, rocking the man backward.

Corey surged to his feet, leading with his left, keeping Higgins slightly off balance. Corey's real power was all in his right, but his left was also strong. And after the damage he had inflicted on his own ribs swinging at Patrick last night, Corey was leery of opening up with his right again.

Out of the corner of his eye, Corey could see Lieutenant Summers still pointing his pistol through the door to the back room. He hoped that Lieutenant Ridgewood was pointing his pistol right back at him.

Gunshots sounded from somewhere out in the fort, and Corey lowered his left shoulder and charged into Higgins. The big man staggered backward, and they both burst through the front door into the dirt road beyond it.

A small crowd of people was walking toward them, led by Father Murphy. In no time at all they were breaking off their conversation to gather around Corey and Higgins and shouting both questions and words of encouragement.

"Why are they already fighting?" one man wanted to know as the two boxers rolled to their feet and lunged at each other.

Remembering Miss Parson's request and beginning to appreciate the complexity of her plan, Corey let Higgins beat off his attack and back him around the circle taking shape as the crowd closed in around them.

"Does anyone have an objection," Father Murphy shouted, "to having this fight count as tomorrow's match?"

A flurry of voices answered him, but Corey couldn't distinguish any words as Higgins took the opportunity to jab his fist repeatedly into Corey's face. Higgins had decent form and a lot of power in his frame. In Corey's mind, the outcome of this battle was by no means a certain thing.

"All right then," Father Murphy shouted. "All bets are in force. Has anyone seen Miss Parson?"

"I'm right here," Miss Parson said, suddenly appearing in the broken door of the house. "I'm right here and my money still says Rock Quarry Callaghan can beat Private Higgins."

One look at the punishment Higgins was inflicting on Corey had half a dozen men crowding around Miss Parson to make further bets.

Corey wiped at his face to clear his vision. Higgins fist had cut him over his left eye, and the blood leaking from the gash was becoming a problem for him. What was worse, Higgins had figured out that Corey still didn't want to use his right arm, and that was making him even bolder. The private waded in with a left-right combination Corey couldn't adequately see. Higgins ended his advance by driving Corey sprawling into the crowd near Miss Parson.

As helpful hands hefted Corey up to throw him back at Higgins, Corey heard Miss Parson's voice quietly reassuring him. "The bets are placed and the colonel has arrived. You can take him now, Mr. Callaghan."

Corey was already struggling to keep his balance as the crowd excitedly propelled him back into the circle. It looked to him as if he was about to disappoint Miss Parson.

Higgins's grin was broad and malicious. The man was probably too stupid to realize that this fight meant nothing to the outcome of the standoff in Lieutenant Summers's house. With this sort of crowd gathered, there would be no way to hide the blame when the carbines were uncovered for the colonel.

Or maybe there was, Corey suddenly realized. If Higgins won the fight, the crowd might well lift him up on its shoulders and march off with him to celebrate. Justice for Summers and possibly Lieutenant Ridgewood's life might well depend on Corey defeating Higgins here.

Not that any of that really mattered. Corey had no intention of letting Higgins beat him. The ring was Corey's glory and he wasn't laying down for anyone. Not that he had any idea how he was going to beat the bigger man.

"Break his nose, Corey!" A familiar voice shouted from the crowd. "Give him something to worry about for a change!"

Corey responded to Patrick's advice without conscious thought. He jabbed three times with his left at Higgins's face. The other boxer bobbed and weaved, but his confidence in Corey's injuries caused him to discount the threat of Corey's right hand. Knowing how badly it was going to hurt, Corey swung anyway, winding up and landing his right-hand knuckles squarely on the bridge of Higgins's nose.

Higgins staggered backward in surprise and pain. Blood spurted down over his chin and onto his chest. The burn in Corey's side ripped around the bottom of his rib cage and up into his chest, but he didn't permit himself to hesitate. Clamping his right arm hard against his side, he immediately closed the gap between himself and Higgins, driving two more left-hand punches hard into the bigger man's face.

Higgins lunged out toward him, acting more like a wrestler than a boxer.

Corey danced to the side and hit him again as he passed.

Blood from his shattered nose flowed into Higgins's mouth as the private gasped for breath. He whirled back into the fight, trying to take Corey down with one mammoth swing.

Corey stepped past the blow and drove his left straight from the shoulder into Higgins's cheek. The private snapped back at him faster than Corey expected, driving three punishing body blows into Corey's chest.

Rock Quarry Callaghan staggered back in pain, certain that the big man had him. But Higgins wasted the opportunity clawing at his face, trying to clear a path through which the air could reach his lungs again.

This was the pivotal moment. Higgins really wasn't that badly hurt, not nearly as badly hurt as Corey's ribs seemed to be. But Private Higgins wasn't as experienced as Rock Quarry Callaghan. He was off balance and maybe a little scared, and that made him vulnerable where he shouldn't have been.

"Press him, Corey, press him!" Patrick shouted. "Don't let him breathe! Don't let him rest!"

Corey took the old man's advice, driving the big man before him with his left, hoping that Higgins wouldn't trip and fall and thus give himself the few moments he needed to recover himself.

Left, left, left, despite Corey's best efforts, Higgins was on the cusp of recovering his stride. Corey simply could not let that happen. Injured as he was, he couldn't afford to let Higgins get back into the fight.

Half blinded by the cut above his eye, Corey stepped in even closer and pounded Higgins with body blows from both his left and right fists. The ribs burned, but not like they had with a full roundhouse swing.

Higgins stumbled backward until his back pressed against the wall of Lieutenant Summers's house. His eyes were wide and his mouth gasped for air Corey wouldn't let his lungs contain. His flesh grew very red even without the sheen of blood across his face, and the private's eyes began to turn up in his head.

Corey took a step back from Higgins, but he wasn't finished with the private yet. He'd never knocked a man out with his left before, and he wanted to enjoy it. As the bigger man staggered a step away from the building, Corey cocked his left fist back as far as it would go. He steadied Higgins's swaying body with a light touch of his right hand, then let loose with all of the power he could muster and knocked the private out cold.

Shocked silence blanketed the Fort Bridger crowd, broken only when Patrick suddenly shouted, "That's me lad, Rock Quarry Callaghan!"

Like a breaking wave, conversations started up again as people began to discuss the fight and pay off their bets. Hands clapped Corey on the shoulders as he stood breathing raggedly, holding his right side. Suddenly, Colonel Holworth appeared in front of him, tossing him a silver dollar as a tip.

"Well fought, Mr. Callaghan! I wish I had seen it all! For some reason I thought you were planning to fight Private Higgins, tomorrow night."

Before Corey could answer, Miss Parson stepped up beside him, her voice loud and firm. "He was, Colonel, but Lieutenant Ridgewood discovered that Private Higgins and Lieutenant Summers were behind the theft of your Springfield carbines. He came here to discuss the situation with Lieutenant Summers and offer his brother officer the chance to make things right by turning himself in and pleading for your mercy. But Lieutenant Summers isn't honorable. He drew a gun on Lieutenant Ridgewood and Private Higgins attacked Mr. Callaghan and, well, you can see the result."

Near silence once again blanketed the street as Miss Parson finished talking. All eyes were on the lady gambler, Colonel Holworth, and the broken door of the house. The colonel's face

was grave, but he didn't say anything.

Father Murphy stepped up and offered Miss Parson his assistance. "Do you mean to say that all of those missing carbines are in this house?"

"Yes, Father," Miss Parson confirmed, as if she hadn't already told him this when she asked for his help in bringing civilian witnesses. "And Lieutenant Summers is still in there, presumably with a gun leveled at Lieutenant Ridgewood."

Colonel Holworth took a deep breath. "I think I'd better take a look for myself."

Patrick avoided Corey for five hours following the fight, then shamefaced and stinking of whiskey, he sought out his prize-fighter and begged his forgiveness.

"You were right, Corey, me lad. I lost too much at cards. Now you've had your big fight, gotten yourself hurt, and I haven't made enough betting on you to make it worthwhile." Patrick shuddered as if contemplating a fate worse than death. "Now we're going to have to get jobs."

"That's pretty serious," Corey agreed. "Look, why don't you let me hold our money for a while? If you can stay away from the tables, maybe we can scrape by long enough to let me do some healing."

Red with embarrassment and grief, Patrick handed Corey two dollars and thirty-seven cents. "I've already lost most of it," he confessed. "I got two-to-one odds since most folks knew you were hurt, but I just didn't have enough of a stake left to make it pay."

Corey shook his head. "Patrick, I just don't know what to do with you. You won't listen to anyone but yourself. These are the years we should be getting ahead in the game, not turning out our pockets to find our last penny."

"I know, Corey, me lad, I know."

Patrick was contrite for the moment, but Corey knew the man well enough to know it wouldn't last. The next time he had two coins jingling in his pocket, the lure of the poker table would call to him again. Ultimately, that was why Patrick O'Sullivan was beating the trail with Corey here in the West rather than managing a great fighter back in Boston or New York City. He had the skill and the knowledge, but not the discipline.

"We'll get by somehow," Patrick told him, his spirits already rebounding, since Corey was no longer angry at him. "You're very good with your hands. And after you're healed, well there'll be no stopping us. We'll work our way across the Northwest, then come round the South, back East again. By the time we're back in

Boston we'll be kings of the world."

Corey couldn't help smiling even as he shook his head. Patrick's enthusiasm had always been infectious.

"I can't thank the four of you enough," Lieutenant Ridgewood said the next morning. The colonel spoke to me late last night. He and the other officers believe that my recovering the stolen carbines simply confirms their gut impression that I'm a solid and dependable man. They're going to quash the court martial by sending a report recommending I be decorated for courage under fire. I'm to take over my new responsibilities immediately."

Corey blinked with surprise. In truth, he hadn't spent any time thinking about Lieutenant Ridgewood's situation since the fight, but now that he did, he couldn't begin to imagine how the lieutenant's minor role in yesterday's affair had helped him out of the mess on the train. He looked to Miss Parson for clarification, but she was exchanging glances with Father Murphy.

"That's mighty fine news," the priest said. "I'm glad to hear that the army is once again recognizing your considerable worth."

Lieutenant Ridgewood swelled with pride and contentment.

"Tell me," the priest continued, "what is to become of Lieutenant Summers?"

"He's a lucky one," Lieutenant Ridgewood told them. "Colonel Holworth is minded to sweep this whole unfortunate affair under the rug. Of course, I agreed to keep silent about it as well. After all, it wasn't really my victory. Miss Parson here is the one who figured everything out."

Miss Parson was smiling broadly and exchanging another glance with Father Murphy.

"So Summers gets off scot-free?" Patrick asked.

"He had already decided to leave the service," Lieutenant Ridgewood reminded them. "A trial would serve no purpose other than to embarrass Colonel Holworth and Fort Bridger. After all, no real harm was done. All the carbines were recovered."

No harm if you ignore one badly beaten Mormon trader, Corey thought.

"I'm so happy for you, Lieutenant," Miss Parson said. "Will you tell us what happens next?"

"Well, I assume my new duties, and you are all free to return to your normal lives with the Colonel's and my gratitude. He and Mrs. Holworth will tell you this formally over supper tonight. I'll be there as well, but let me just say this while I have the four of you in private. This is twice now that you have come to my assis-

tance when no one could or should have expected you to. On my sacred honor as an officer and a gentleman, if there is anything I can ever do to assist you in return, you have but to ask. And that goes for my family as well. The Ridgewoods aren't unimportant in Cincinnati, and you'll find brothers of mine scattered all over the West."

The five shook hands and Ridgewood excused himself.

When he had left, Father Murphy cleared his throat. "I believe I owe you an apology, Miss Parson."

"You do?"

"Yes, when you first approached me with this plan I didn't think it could do Lieutenant Ridgewood a lick of good. Oh, I agreed to help because I didn't think it could hurt him either, and frankly, I'm not fond of Lieutenant Summers. But you proved me wrong. I apologize for doubting you."

"Why, I didn't know you had any doubts, Father. I thought it was pretty plain that Colonel Holworth would do just about anything to avoid an embarrassment to his command. The trick was to create an incident so public he couldn't completely quash it locally and embarrassing enough that he wouldn't want Lieutenant Ridgewood talking about it back East at his court martial."

"Well it worked perfectly," Father Murphy said, "and you even gave us a chance to collect our money betting on Mr. Callaghan. Well done, Rock Quarry! I made a small fortune on you yesterday, and most of it at four-to-one odds."

"Four-to-one?" Patrick repeated.

"Is that all?" Miss Parsons asked. "With Higgins the local favorite and Mr. Callaghan known to be injured, I would have thought you'd do better."

"Better?" Patrick sputtered.

"Well, I'm just a poor priest from Ireland," Father Murphy reminded everyone. "I didn't see any reason to get greedy with the locals."

"How much better?" Patrick asked.

Corey clapped Patrick on the shoulder. "Maybe you need a trainer as well." 🐾

BOOKED & PRINTED

ROBERT C. HAHN

With the recent release of a new Nancy Drew movie and the publication of the final Harry Potter book (in which the solutions to many mysteries are revealed), this is an auspicious time to consider the burgeoning field of young adult mysteries. Though Nancy Drew and the Hardy Boys are still introducing many young readers to the delights of mystery stories, what are the contemporary novels targeted for young adults with reading skills and interests closer to adult size than child size? Here are four current books that feature youthful protagonists, good writing, and serious treatment of substantive issues.

Nancy Springer, who has crafted series based on familiar English legends such as Robin Hood (*Girl Outlaw of Sherwood: A Tale of Rowan Hood*, 2003) and Camelot (*I Am Mordred*, 1998), has also created young Enola Holmes, who was introduced in 2006 with *The Case of the Missing Marquess* and whose adventures continue in **THE CASE OF THE LEFT-HANDED LADY** (Philomel, \$12.99).

Enola (her name spelled backward makes ALONE) is the sister of Sherlock and Mycroft Holmes, and the rebellious young teen whose mother has left her to shift for herself faces challenges and obstacles greater than any her brothers ever faced. Victorian society kept women tightly corseted both literally and figuratively, and Enola wants no part of such restrictions. But it is not easy for a fourteen year old to make her own way.

The audacious teen sets herself up as a “perditorian”—a finder of lost objects or persons—with a false front to hide her youth and sex. She even matches wits with her famous brother who is trying to locate her. She also takes on the case of a missing girl, encounters a fiendish killer, and introduces readers to some of the grim realities of life in London in the late 1800s for all but the wealthy. Enola Holmes is an engaging and resourceful young heroine, and Springer’s creation may well serve as an enjoyable springboard inviting young readers to dive into the rich world of Sherlockiana.

Robert B. Parker is justly praised for his Spenser and his Jesse Stone novels for adult readers. Now he is reaching out to a

younger audience, and in **EDENVILLE OWLS** (Philomel, \$17.99) Parker offers a promising new series.

Bobby Murphy is an adolescent growing up in a post-WW II world, discovering basketball, girls, and adult problems all in one eventful school year. Adults who read this young adult novel will find many stylistic similarities to Parker's adult mysteries, although the sexual banter and innuendo is replaced in *Edenville Owls* by teenage angst and the artless dance between Bobby and his friend Joanie Gibson.

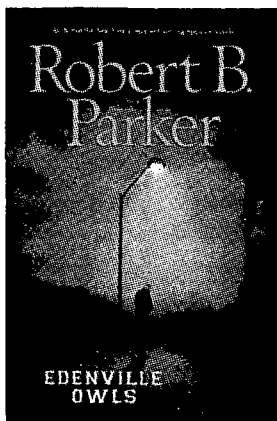
Bobby and his buddies form a school basketball team, although they have no coach and there are only five players, which means no substitutes. The five boys bond in their quest to qualify for the state school tournament—and Parker nails this David vs. Goliath quest perfectly as the teammates begin to meld and teach themselves how to play and how to win.

The mystery element comes in when Bobby and his friend Nick observe their teacher Miss Delaney in an argument with a stranger. They also can't help but notice her absence and, on her return, the fading bruises. Determined to help, Bobby schemes to learn more about the stranger and the problem Miss Delaney faces.

Parker recaptures the period quite nicely and delves into a number of the hidden problems behind the nostalgic gloss time has layered over the era.

Alan Gratz, the author of *Samurai Shortstop* (2006), an American Library Association Best Book for Young Adults selection, reprises the plot of Hamlet to create what he calls "pulp Shakespeare" in **SOMETHING ROTTEN: A HORATIO WILKES MYSTERY** (Dial, \$16.99). In this modern day version, Gratz takes on a slew of contemporary problems—pollution, alcoholism, corporate greed—to which he adds murder.

Horatio's schoolmate and friend Hamilton Prince is the son of the owner of the Elsinore Paper Plant in Denmark, Tennessee (readers will quickly notice the plethora of Hamlet references). When Horatio arrives to spend a month's worth of summer vacation at his friend's home, he soon discovers that all is not well: Hamilton's father has died while the son was still in a Knoxville boarding school. By the time Horatio comes home, Hamilton's mother has already remarried. And yes, she's married Hamilton's uncle, Claude.

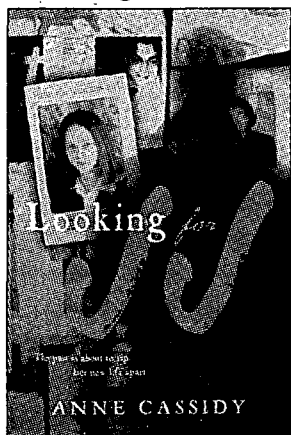


A videotape left by Hamilton's father indicates that he has been murdered, and Hamilton, aided by Horatio, sets out to prove it. But Hamilton is overwhelmed by his anger and turns increasingly to alcohol to escape. The sharp-witted and sharp-tongued Horatio makes a good detective as he probes for the elusive truth behind Claude's marriage and takeover of the plant, the plant's egregious pollution, the machinations of a takeover artist, and the fractious romance between Hamilton and his ecology-conscious girlfriend, Olivia.

Gratz may have borrowed a good deal of the plotting, but the contemporary setting and problems facing young Horatio should make it appealing to its intended audience.

Anne Cassidy's *LOOKING FOR JJ* (Harcourt, \$17) is by far the most intense of the books considered here, and though aimed at children fourteen and up, it clearly could have been designed for adult audiences as well.

The English author's complex novel tells the story of Jennifer Jones (JJ), who at age ten committed a crime that shocked England: She killed her young playmate. Now sixteen, Jennifer has emerged from prison with a new identity and is attempting to create a new life for herself.



The details of the efforts to keep her past hidden from a voracious media and allow her to build a future are artfully intertwined with revelations about her childhood and how her crime came to be committed. This moving and affecting book deals with questions of bullying, sexual abuse, poverty, and social services,

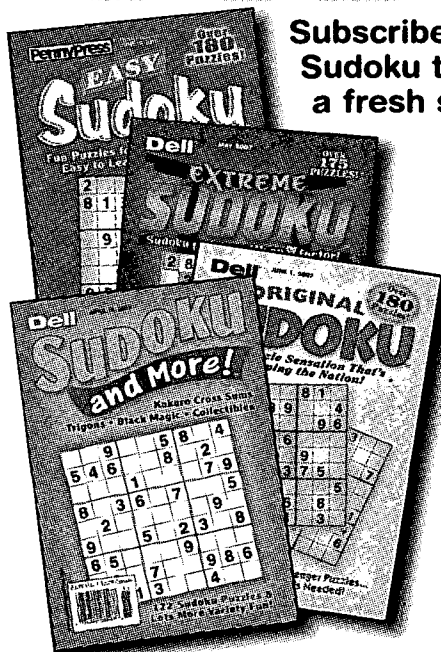
and raises more questions than it answers as it depicts a girl twice deprived of childhood.

In addition, we should note that many young adult readers are able to move easily from juvenile to adult mysteries. Laurie R. King has been delighted with the number of young female readers who have cut their mystery teeth on her Mary Russell novels. And Elizabeth Peters's Amelia Peabody mysteries would appeal to any adventurous young adult.

Altogether, the options available to young mystery readers interested in mysteries are both various and numerous.

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A WATCHER BY THE DEAD

In an upper room of an unoccupied dwelling in that part of San Francisco known as North Beach lay the body of a man under a sheet. The hour was near nine in the evening; the room was dimly lighted by a single candle. Although the weather was warm, the two windows, contrary to the custom which gives the dead plenty of air, were closed and the blinds drawn down. The furniture of the room consisted of but three pieces—an armchair, a small reading-stand, supporting the candle, and a long kitchen table, supporting the body of the man. All these, as also the corpse, would seem to have been recently brought in, for an observer, had there been one, would have seen that all were free from dust, whereas everything else in the room was pretty thickly coated with it, and there were cobwebs in the angles of the walls.

Under the sheet the outlines of the body could be traced, even the features, these having that unnaturally sharp definition which seems to belong to faces of the dead, but is really characteristic of those only that have been wasted by disease. From the silence of the room one would rightly have inferred that it was not in the front of the house, facing a street. It really faced nothing but a high breast of rock, the rear of the building being set into a hill.

As a neighboring church clock was striking nine with an indolence which seemed to imply such an indifference to the flight of time that one could hardly help wondering why it took the trouble to strike at all, the single door of the room was opened and a man entered, advancing toward the body. As he did so the door closed, apparently of its own volition; there was a grating, as of a key turned with difficulty, and the snap of the lock bolt as it shot into its socket. A sound of retiring footsteps in the passage outside ensued, and the man was, to all appearance, a prisoner. Advancing to the table, he stood a moment looking down at the body; then, with a slight shrug of the shoulders, walked over to one of the win-

dows and hoisted the blind. The darkness outside was absolute, the panes were covered with dust, but, by wiping this away, he could see that the window was fortified with strong iron bars crossing it within a few inches of the glass, and embedded in the masonry on each side. He examined the other window. It was the same. He manifested no great curiosity in the matter, did not even so much as raise the sash. If he was a prisoner he was apparently a tractable one. Having completed his examination of the room, he seated himself in the armchair, took a book from his pocket, drew the stand with its candle alongside and began to read.

The man was young—not more than thirty—dark in complexion, smooth-shaven, with brown hair. His face was thin and high-nosed, with a broad forehead and a “firmness” of the chin and jaw which is said by those having it to denote resolution. The eyes were gray and steadfast, not moving except with definitive purpose. They were now for the greater part of the time fixed upon his book, but he occasionally withdrew them and turned them to the body on the table, not, apparently, from any dismal fascination which, under such circumstances, it might be supposed to exercise upon even a courageous person, nor with a conscious rebellion against the opposite influence which might dominate a timid one. He looked at it as if in his reading he had come upon something recalling him to a sense of his surroundings. Clearly this watcher by the dead was discharging his trust with intelligence and composure, as became him.

After reading for perhaps a half-hour he seemed to come to the end of a chapter and quietly laid away the book. He then rose, and, taking the reading-stand from the floor, carried it into a corner of the room near one of the windows, lifted the candle from it, and returned to the empty fireplace before which he had been sitting.

A moment later he walked over to the body on the table, lifted the sheet, and turned it back from the head, exposing a mass of dark hair and a thin face-cloth, beneath which the features showed with even sharper definition than before. Shading his eyes by interposing his free hand between them and the candle, he stood looking at his motionless companion with a serious and tranquil regard. Satisfied with his inspection, he pulled the sheet over the face again, and returning to the chair, took some matches off the candlestick, put them in the side-pocket of his sack coat and sat down. He then lifted the candle from its socket and looked at it critically, as if calculating how long it would last. It was barely two inches long; in another hour he would be in darkness! He replaced it in the candlestick and blew it out.

II

In a physician's office in Kearny Street three men sat about a table, drinking punch and smoking. It was late in the evening, almost midnight, indeed, and there had been no lack of punch. The eldest of the three, Dr. Helberson, was the host; it was in his rooms they sat. He was about thirty years of age; the others were even younger; all were physicians.

"The superstitious awe with which the living regard the dead," said Dr. Helberson, "is hereditary and incurable. One need no more be ashamed of it than of the fact that he inherits, for example, an incapacity for mathematics, or a tendency to lie."

The others laughed. "Oughtn't a man to be ashamed to be a liar?" asked the youngest of the three, who was, in fact, a medical student not yet graduated.

"My dear Harper, I said nothing about that. The tendency to lie is one thing; lying is another."

"But do you think," said the third man, "that this superstitious feeling, this fear of the dead, reasonless as we know it to be, is universal? I am myself not conscious of it."

"Oh, but it is 'in your system' for all that," replied Helberson: "it needs only the right conditions—what Shakespeare calls the 'confederate season'—to manifest itself in some very disagreeable way that will open your eyes. Physicians and soldiers are, of course, more nearly free from it than others."

"Physicians and soldiers;—why don't you add hangmen and headsman? Let us have in all the assassin classes."

"No, my dear Mánchez; the juries will not let the public executioners acquire sufficient familiarity with death to be altogether unmoved by it."

Young Harper, who had been helping himself to a fresh cigar at the sideboard, resumed his seat. "What would you consider conditions under which any man of woman born would become insupportably conscious of his share of our common weakness in this regard?" he asked, rather verbosely.

"Well, I should say that if a man were locked up all night with a corpse—alone—in a dark room—of a vacant house—with no bed-covers to pull over his head—and lived through it without going altogether mad—he might justly boast himself not of woman born, nor yet, like Macduff, a product of Cæsarean section."

"I thought you never would finish piling up conditions," said Harper; "but I know a man who is neither a physician nor a soldier who will accept them all, for any stake you like to name."

"Who is he?"

"His name is J̄arette—a stranger in California; comes from my town in New York. I haven't any money to back him, but he will back himself with dead loads of it."

"How do you know that?"

"He would rather bet than eat. As for fear—I dare say he thinks it some cutaneous disorder, or, possibly, a particular kind of religious heresy."

"What does he look like?" Helberson was evidently becoming interested.

"Like Mancher, here—might be his twin brother."

"I accept the challenge," said Helberson, promptly.

"Awfully obliged to you for the compliment, I'm sure," drawled Mancher, who was growing sleepy. "Can't I get into this?"

"Not against me," Helberson said. "I don't want *your* money."

"All right," said Mancher; "I'll be the corpse."

The others laughed.

The outcome of this crazy conversation we have seen.

III

In extinguishing his meager allowance of candle Mr. J̄arette's object was to preserve it against some unforeseen need. He may have thought, too, or half thought, that the darkness would be no worse at one time than another, and if the situation became insupportable, it would be better to have a means of relief, or even release. At any rate, it was wise to have a little reserve of light, even if only to enable him to look at his watch.

No sooner had he blown out the candle and set it on the floor at his side than he settled himself comfortably in the armchair, leaned back and closed his eyes, hoping and expecting to sleep. In this he was disappointed; he had never in his life felt less sleepy, and in a few minutes he gave up the attempt. But what could he do? He could not go groping about in the absolute darkness at the risk of bruising himself—at the risk, too, of blundering against the table and rudely disturbing the dead. We all recognize their right to lie at rest, with immunity from all that is harsh and violent. J̄arette almost succeeded in making himself believe that considerations of that kind restrained him from risking the collision and fixed him to the chair.

While thinking of this matter he fancied that he heard a faint sound in the direction of the table—what kind of sound he could hardly have explained. He did not turn his head. Why should he—in the darkness? But he listened—why should he not? And listening he grew giddy and grasped the arms of the chair for support.

There was a strange ringing in his ears; his head seemed bursting; his chest was oppressed by the constriction of his clothing. He wondered why it was so, and whether these were symptoms of fear. Suddenly, with a long and strong expiration, his chest appeared to collapse, and with the great gasp with which he refilled his exhausted lungs the vertigo left him, and he knew that so intently had he listened that he had held his breath almost to suffocation. The revelation was vexatious; he arose, pushed away the chair with his foot, and strode to the center of the room. But one does not stride far in darkness; he began to grope, and, finding the wall, followed it to an angle, turned, followed it past the two windows, and there in another corner came in violent contact with the reading-stand, overturning it. It made a clatter which startled him. He was annoyed. "How the devil could I have forgotten where it was!" he muttered, and groped his way along the third wall to the fireplace. "I must put things to rights," said Mr. Jarette, feeling the floor for the candle.

Having recovered that, he lighted it and instantly turned his eyes to the table, where, naturally, nothing had undergone any change. The reading-stand lay unobserved upon the floor; he had forgotten to "put it to rights." He looked all about the room, dispersing the deeper shadows by movements of the candle in his hand, and, finally, crossing over to the door, tried it by turning and pulling the knob with all his strength. It did not yield, and this seemed to afford him a certain satisfaction; indeed, he secured it more firmly by a bolt which he had not before observed. Returning to his chair, he looked at his watch; it was half-past nine. With a start of surprise he held the watch at his ear. It had not stopped. The candle was now visibly shorter. He again extinguished it, placing it on the floor at his side as before.

Mr. Jarette was not at his ease; he was distinctly dissatisfied with his surroundings, and with himself for being so. "What have I to fear?" he thought. "This is ridiculous and disgraceful; I will not be so great a fool." But courage does not come of saying, "I will be courageous," nor of recognizing its appropriateness to the occasion. The more Jarette condemned himself, the more reason he gave himself for condemnation; the greater the number of variations which he played upon the simple theme of the harmlessness of the dead, the more horrible grew the discord of his emotions. "What!" he cried aloud in the anguish of his spirit. "What! shall I, who have not a shade of superstition in my nature—I, who have no belief in immortality—I, who know (and never more clearly than now) that the afterlife is the dream of a desire—shall I lose at once my bet, my honor, and my self-respect, perhaps my rea-

son, because certain savage ancestors, dwelling in caves and burrows, conceived the monstrous notion that the dead walk by night; that—" distinctly, unmistakably, Mr. Jarette heard behind him a light, soft sound of footfalls, deliberate, regular, and successively nearer!

IV

Just before daybreak the next morning Dr. Helberson and his young friend Harper were driving slowly through the streets of North Beach in the doctor's coupé.

"Have you still the confidence of youth in the courage or stolidity of your friend?" said the elder man. "Do you believe that I have lost this wager?"

"I *know* you have," replied the other, with enfeebling emphasis.

"Well, upon my soul, I hope so."

It was spoken earnestly, almost solemnly. There was a silence for a few moments.

"Harper," the doctor resumed, looking very serious in the shifting half-lights that entered the carriage as they passed the street-lamps, "I don't feel altogether comfortable about this business. If your friend had not irritated me by the contemptuous manner in which he treated my doubt of his endurance—a purely physical quality—and by the cool uncivility of his suggestion that the corpse be that of a physician, I should not have gone on with it. If anything should happen, we are ruined, as I fear we deserve to be."

"What can happen? Even if the matter should be taking a serious turn—of which I am not at all afraid—Manchester has only to resurrect himself and explain matters. With a genuine 'subject' from the dissecting-room, or one of your late patients, it might be different."

Dr. Manchester, then, had been as good as his promise; he was the "corpse."

Dr. Helberson was silent for a long time, as the carriage, at a snail's pace, crept along the same street it had traveled two or three times already. Presently he spoke: "Well, let us hope that Manchester, if he has had to rise from the dead, has been discreet about it. A mistake in that might make matters worse instead of better."

"Yes," said Harper, "Jarette would kill him. But, doctor"—looking at his watch as the carriage passed a gas-lamp—"it is nearly four o'clock at last."

A moment later the two had quitted the vehicle, and were walking briskly toward the long unoccupied house belonging to the

doctor, in which they had immured Mr. Jarette, in accordance with the terms of the mad wager. As they neared it, they met a man running. "Can you tell me," he cried, suddenly checking his speed, "where I can find a physician?"

"What's the matter?" Helberson asked, non-committal.

"Go and see for yourself," said the man, resuming his running.

They hastened on. Arrived at the house, they saw several persons entering in haste and excitement. In some of the dwellings near by and across the way, the chamber windows were thrown up, showing a protrusion of heads. All heads were asking questions, none heeding the questions of the others. A few of the windows with closed blinds were illuminated; the inmates of those rooms were dressing to come down. Exactly opposite the door of the house which they sought, a street-lamp threw a yellow, insufficient light upon the scene, seeming to say that it could disclose a good deal more if it wished. Harper, who was now deathly pale, paused at the door and laid a hand upon his companion's arm. "It's all up with us, doctor," he said in extreme agitation, which contrasted strangely with his free and easy words; "the game has gone against us all. Let's not go in there; I'm for lying low."

"I'm a physician," said Dr. Helberson, calmly; "there may be need of one."

They mounted the doorsteps and were about to enter. The door was open; the street-lamp opposite lighted the passage into which it opened. It was full of people. Some had ascended the stairs at the farther end, and, denied admittance above, waited for better fortune. All were talking, none listening. Suddenly, on the upper landing there was a great commotion; a man had sprung out of a door and was breaking away from those endeavoring to detain him. Down through the mass of affrighted idlers he came, pushing them aside, flattening them against the wall on one side, or compelling them to cling by the rail on the other, clutching them by the throat, striking them savagely, thrusting them back down the stairs, and walking over the fallen. His clothing was in disorder, he was without a hat. His eyes, wild and restless, had in them something more terrifying than his apparently superhuman strength. His face, smooth-shaven, was bloodless, his hair snow white.

As the crowd at the foot of the stairs, having more freedom, fell away to let him pass, Harper sprang forward. "Jarette! Jarette!" he cried.

Dr. Helberson seized Harper by the collar and dragged him back. The man looked into their faces without seeming to see them, and sprang through the door, down the steps, into the street

and away. A stout policeman, who had had inferior success in conquering his way down the stairway, followed a moment later and started in pursuit, all the heads in the windows—those of women and children now—screaming in guidance.

The stairway being now partly cleared, most of the crowd having rushed down to the street to observe the flight and pursuit, Dr. Helberson mounted to the landing, followed by Harper. At a door in the upper passage an officer denied them admittance. "We are physicians," said the doctor, and they passed in. The room was full of men, dimly seen, crowded about a table. The newcomers edged their way forward, and looked over the shoulders of those in the front rank. Upon the table, the lower limbs covered with a sheet, lay the body of a man, brilliantly illuminated by the beam of a bull's-eye lantern held by a policeman standing at the feet. The others, excepting those near the head—the officer himself—all were in darkness. The face of the body showed yellow, repulsive, horrible! The eyes were partly open and upturned, and the jaw fallen; traces of froth defiled the lips, the chin, the cheeks. A tall man, evidently a physician, bent over the body with his hand thrust under the shirt front. He withdrew it and placed two fingers in the open mouth. "This man has been about two hours dead," said he. "It is a case for the coroner."

He drew a card from his pocket, handed it to the officer, and made his way toward the door.

"Clear the room—out, all!" said the officer, sharply, and the body disappeared as if it had been snatched away, as he shifted the lantern and flashed its beam of light here and there against the faces of the crowd. The effect was amazing! The men, blinded, confused, almost terrified, made a tumultuous rush for the door, pushing, crowding, and tumbling over one another as they fled, like the hosts of Night before the shafts of Apollo. Upon the struggling, trampling mass the officer poured his light without pity and without cessation. Caught in the current, Helberson and Harper were swept out of the room and cascaded down the stairs into the street.

"Good God, doctor! did I not tell you that Jarette would kill him?" said Harper, as soon as they were clear of the crowd.

"I believe you did," replied the other without apparent emotion.

They walked on in silence, block after block. Against the graying east the dwellings of our hill tribes showed in silhouette. The familiar milk-wagon was already astir in the streets; the baker's man would soon come upon the scene; the newspaper carrier was abroad in the land.

"It strikes me, youngster," said Helberson, "that you and I have

been having too much of the morning air lately. It is unwholesome; we need a change. What do you say to a tour in Europe?"

"When?"

"I'm not particular. I should suppose that four o'clock this afternoon would be early enough."

"I'll meet you at the boat," said Harper.

V

Seven years afterward these two men sat upon a bench in Madison Square, New York, in familiar conversation. Another man, who had been observing them for some time, himself unobserved, approached and, courteously lifting his hat from locks as white as snow, said: "I beg your pardon, gentlemen, but when you have killed a man by coming to life, it is best to change clothes with him, and at the first opportunity make a break for liberty."

Helberson and Harper exchanged significant glances. They were apparently amused. The former then looked the stranger kindly in the eye and replied:

"That has always been my plan. I entirely agree with you as to its advantage—"

He stopped suddenly and grew deathly pale. He stared at the man, open-mouthed; he trembled visibly.

"Ah!" said the stranger, "I see that you are indisposed, doctor. If you cannot treat yourself, Dr. Harper can do something for you, I am sure."

"Who the devil are you?" said Harper bluntly.

The stranger came nearer, and, bending toward them, said in a whisper: "I call myself Jarette sometimes, but I don't mind telling you, for old friendship, that I am Dr. William Mancher."

The revelation brought both men to their feet. "Mancher!" they cried in a breath; and Helberson added: "It is true, by God!"

"Yes," said the stranger, smiling vaguely, "it is true enough, no doubt."

He hesitated, and seemed to be trying to recall something, then began humming a popular air. He had apparently forgotten their presence.

"Look here, Mancher," said the elder of the two, "tell us just what occurred that night—to Jarette, you know."

"Oh, yes, about Jarette," said the other. "It's odd I should have neglected to tell you—I tell it so often. You see I knew, by overhearing him talking to himself, that he was pretty badly frightened. So I couldn't resist the temptation to come to life and have a bit of fun out of him—I couldn't, really. That was all right,

though certainly I did not think he would take it seriously; I did not, truly. And afterward—well, it was a tough job changing places with him, and then—damn you! you didn't let me out!"

Nothing could exceed the ferocity with which these last words were delivered. Both men stepped back in alarm.

"We?—why—why—" Helberson stammered, losing his self-possession utterly, "we had nothing to do with it."

"Didn't I say you were Doctors Hellborn and Sharper?" inquired the lunatic, laughing.

"My name is Helberson, yes; and this gentleman is Mr. Harper," replied the former, reassured. "But we are not physicians now; we are—well, hang it, old man, we are gamblers."

And that was the truth.

"A very good profession—very good, indeed; and, by the way, I hope Sharper here paid over Jarette's money like an honest stakeholder. A very good and honorable profession," he repeated, thoughtfully, moving carelessly away; "but I stick to the old one. I am High Supreme Medical Officer of the Bloomington Asylum; it is my duty to cure the superintendent." ♀

Solution to the November "UNSOLVED"

Dan Vincent, the agent at Georgetown, turned in \$1,000 less than the value of items he sold.

AGENT	TOWN	CARBUR.	TIMERS	SP. PLUGS	CRANKSH.	TOTAL
Al Upson	Huntington	5 (\$5,000)	6 (\$6,000)	3 (\$3,000)	4 (\$4,000)	\$30,000
Bob Wilkes	Frankfurt	4 (\$4,000)	3 (\$4,500)	6 (\$12,000)	5 (\$12,500)	\$33,000
Cal Tolliver	Jackson	6 (\$6,000)	4 (\$6,000)	5 (\$10,000)	3 (\$7,500)	\$29,500
Dan Vincent	Georgetown	3 (\$3,000)	5 (\$7,500)	4 (\$8,000)	6 (\$15,000)	\$33,500

THE STORY THAT WON

The June Mysterious Photograph contest was won by Benjamin H. Foreman of Harbor Oaks, Florida.

Honorable mentions go to Rosalie Chappell of Merville, British Columbia, Canada; Judith Fawley of Pensacola, Florida; James Fitzsimmons of Long Beach, California; Jim Knoop of Clay, Michigan; Adrian Ludens of Rapid City, South Dakota; Ed Ridgley of

Phenix City, Alabama; Stephen D. Rogers of Buzzards Bay, Massachusetts; James E. Spitzer of Rochester Hills, Michigan; Gil Stern of Las Vegas, Nevada; and Richard G. Tanner II of Kingsport, Tennessee.



IN PLAIN SIGHT

BENJAMIN H. FOREMAN

"Miss! Miss, are you okay?" The patrolman gently tapped his fingers on the young lady's cheek.

She moaned. Her eyelids fluttered. Her body tensed. "Where . . . am I? Who . . . are you?"

"Flat on your backside in Forest Hill Park, ma'am. I'm Officer Delaney."

"What happened?"

"I was about to ask you that, ma'am," Delaney said. "Here." He extended his hand. "Let me help you up."

"Thank you ever so much, kind sir," she purred. She wobbled unsteady on her feet. Still hanging onto Delaney's hand, she said, "My name's Agnes Simmons."

"Pleased to meet you Ms. Simmons. Now, do you feel up to telling me what happened?"

Agnes retrieved her hand, patted her mouth softly, and said, "Not much to tell, Officer. From out of nowhere this creature dressed in a brown trench coat and dark hat barrels into me, knocking me backward. My head bobbed along the ground. That's all I remember."

"That's the mugger I'm chasing," Delaney said. "Which way did he go?" Agnes pointed toward the woods.

"Will you be okay until the paramedics arrive?"

"Fine, Officer, just fine. You go . . . Oh! Dear me, my purse."

"I didn't see one," Delaney said. "I'll nab the scoundrel. Wait here."

Agnes waved at Delaney's back. She waited for him to disappear into the underbrush before strolling toward the woods. She yanked a dark-haired wig from her head, slipped off an outer dress, and tossed the items into the bushes. They landed on top of a hat, black purse, and trench coat.

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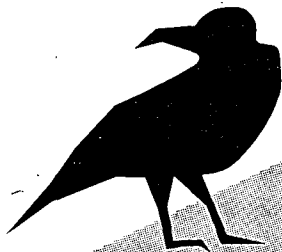
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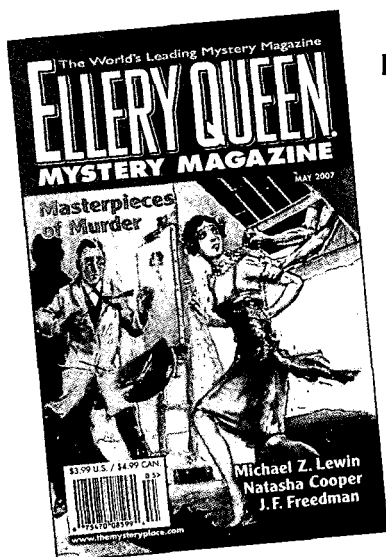
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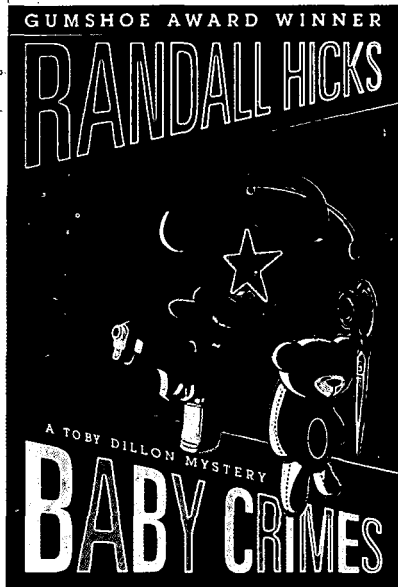
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